Tajikistan Mine Action Programme

Jonmahmad Rajabov
*Tajikistan Mine Action Centre*

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The Tajikistan Mine Action Centre is responsible for all mine-action-related programs in the country. The author details Tajikistan’s landmine problems and provides a report on TMAC’s progress in various aspects of mine action as well as its goals for future mine-related operations.

By Jonmahmad Rajabov  
[Tajikistan Mine Action Centre]

Both sides in Tajikistan’s five-year civil war in the 1990s used anti-personnel mines and many of these weapons remain in place in the country’s central area. Uzbek forces laid APMs along their border with Tajikistan and some remain in disputed territory. Minefields also exist along the border with Afghanistan in land recently handed over to Tajik sovereignty by Russian forces. Nearly 10 years after the end of the civil war, landmines continue to create obstacles for accessing grazing and agricultural land in Tajikistan and cause economic hardship for its people. The problem of landmines and explosive remnants of war contributes to human suffering and insecurity.

The landmine issue continues to be a source of concern for the government of Tajikistan and demining remains vitally important to national development plans. Foreign-manufactured landmines kill, maim, and threaten Tajiks who are living in the poorest areas of their own country. Landmines were placed by the Soviet Union, Russian forces (following Tajik independence), the Tajiks themselves, and Uzbek forces along Uzbek-Tajik borders. Areas on the Afghan and Uzbek borders and former battlefield areas in the central region continue to present a hazard to the rural poor who have to live with the threat of explosive remnants of war as part of their daily lives.

The Tajikistan national government has adopted a long-term strategic plan, one that is linked to future mine-action goals and national development plans. The government’s commitment to mine-action initiatives is visible and increasing. Tajikistan has been a State Party of the Ottawa Convention since 1 April 2000, and the government is also a signatory of Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

Humanitarian Impact of AP Mines and UXO

Landmines and items of unexploded ordnance appeared in the central part of Tajikistan during the civil war years when both sides of the conflict used anti-personnel mines and other ordnances along the Tajik-Uzbek and Tajik-Afghan borders. The central region incorporates the Tavildara region and the Rasht Valley, as well as parts of the Gorno-Badakhshan region. Landmines, UXO, and other remnants of war continue to be a hazard for the people in this region.

Along some parts of the Tajik border with Afghanistan, Russian forces and border troops laid and maintained mines to counter cross-border infiltration and for self-protection. In 2005, Russian forces compiled the hand-over process to Tajik colleagues. Mine records were also provided. Uzbek forces laid APMs along the border with Tajikistan, and the fired deaths and injuries involving civilians in this border area were reported in August 1999. Seventy-two deaths and 85 injuries have occurred in the communities, and in excess of 2,000 head of livestock have been lost. Since 1992, 239 people have been injured and 258 killed as the result of mines accidents in Tajikistan. Children account for 20 percent of these casualties.

The problem of mine contamination seriously affects the civil population who are engaged in the country’s development and agricultural activities related to normal rural life. Landmines also adversely affect agricultural development, the environment and the economy of the country. Almost all the inhabitants within at-risk communities have received mine-risk education and awareness training. Still, economic imperatives drive local populations to continue visiting hazardous areas, which often results in death and injury.

Tajikistan Mine Action Centre

On 20 June 2003, the Tajik government signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme called “Support to the Tajikistan National Mine Action Programme,” and the Tajikistan Mine Action Centre was established. The Centre is a governmental structure and is responsible for all mine-action-related issues in Tajikistan. It is also the executive authority of the national Commission on Implementation of International Humanitarian Law.

Planning, Monitoring and Coordinating

TMAC develops mine-action plans (strategic and annual), national standards and other strategic documents related to mine action and submits them to the Commission on the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law for approval. The implementation of the Tajik Mine Action Programme is in accordance with the Mine Action Strategic Five-Year Plan for 2004-08 and the Annual Plan, which CIIHL approved on 13 April 2004.

TMAC is responsible for coordinating and monitoring all mine-action activities in Tajikistan. Within this framework, TMAC updates the national mine action plan and undertakes the development, priority selection, planning and coordination of operations. It also prioritizes new tasks, confirms completion of tasks and gives certificates of cleared sites to local authorities. TMAC provides its UN Information and Distribution Unit with information on mined areas and operations obtained from the Information Management System for Mine Action, as well as on mine incidents and mine survivors.

TMAC’s multi-sectoral partners include the UNDP, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF, the Tajikistan Red Crescent, representatives of the donor countries in Tajikistan, Fondation Suisse de Déminage, the Genera Internacional Centre for Humanitarian Demining, Ministries of Security, Justice, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Education, Labour and Social Protection, Defence, Health, and Emergency Situations, the State Committee for Protection of the State Border and local executive authorities.

Mine Clearance

In accordance with Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention, each State Party undertakes to destroy or ensure the destruction of all AP mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control, as soon as possible but not later than 10 years after the entry into force of the Convention for Tajikistan this deadline is 1 April 2010.

As a signatory to the Convention, Tajikistan committed to destruction of its stockpiles (3,029 AP mines) on 31 March 2004. The Ministry of Defence, supported by Fondation Suisse de Déminage, undertook the destruction.

On 20 June 2003, the government signed an agreement with FSD. Funding is channelled through the UNDP and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and FSD is now the national survey and mine-clearance partner in Tajikistan, with four survey and four mine-clearance teams. More than 100 mined areas have been identified so far as a result of survey operations.

In 2004, three mined areas were cleared and handed over to local authorities for future use. Since the Technical Survey Program, mine clearance started in July 2004, more than 180,000 square metres (44 acres) and more than 2,000 mines and items of UXO have been cleared.

To speed the process of mine clearance, TMAC plans to establish four mine-detecting dog teams. TMAC thinks this issue is very important for the programme, and the Centre is looking for donors to fund the project.

Mine-risk Education

The Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan, supported by the ICRC and UNICEF, is undertaking MRE in 14 districts of the country (border areas of the Sugd region, the Ravo district and Davron, and the Darvaz district of the Gorno-Badakhshan region). In August 2005, UNICEF initiated a small project under this programme with the Ministry of Education of Tajikistan. RCST and UNICEF volunteers conduct complementary activities to educate the local population about mine hazards and how to live with landmines.

More than 3,200 large mine-hazard warning signs have been manufactured, and more than 2,200 were placed in border areas in the Sugd region. The remainder will be covered in the southern part of the country. In addition, to provide more information on MRE activities, the UN booklets Guidance Materials on Landmines were translated and 6,000 copies in Tajik and 3,000 copies in Uzbek languages were distributed. More than 22,000 leaflets were issued with appropriate guidelines for distribution by the programme’s volunteers, military personnel, local authorities, teachers and active advocates of the programme.

Assistance to Survivors

A project called Assistance to Landmine Survivors, implemented within the framework of cooperation among the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan, ICRC, UNDP and RCST, assisted disabled persons, including landmine survivors, by providing prostheses and medical assistance in the national Orthopaedic Centre, Dushanbe. An income-generation project implemented by RCST in 2005 delivered breeding pairs of goats or sheep to 72 landmine survivors in three districts of the Sugd region and three mine-affected districts of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region to establish small-scale livestock enterprises, each returning one offspring to the RCST to re-distribute and expand the project. There is a need to extend this project in the future to provide for all mine survivors.

A total of 6,000 copies in Tajik and 3,000 copies in Uzbek were distributed. 12,000 copies of mine-related publications were given to the Ministry of Education, the local government, local authorities, teachers, and students for distribution and education.
The Sri Lankan Air Force responded later by bombing several rebel-held areas in other parts of the country. The explosion tore through the packed bus in a crowded part of Kabithigollewa, a town about 200 kilometers south of Colombo. Tamil Eelam (popularly known as the Tamil Tigers), killed more than 64 people and injured dozens more.

A powerful landmine blast ripped through a passenger bus loaded with commuters and schoolchildren in northern Sri Lanka in early June. The attack, attributed to the terrorist group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (popularly known as the Tamil Tigers), killed more than 64 people and injured dozens more. Officials said many of the injured were bystanders not on the bus.

The explosion tore through the packed bus in a crowded part of Kabithigollewa, a town about 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the capital, Colombo. Military officials said the blast came from two landmines hanging from a tree and ripped apart when signaled from a remote location. Rigging wires above ground on trees and other structures is a common Tiger tactic to reduce blast shielding provided by the ground. The Tigers strongly denied responsibility for the attack after government officials assigned blame to the group. The bomb attack was the most violent act since a tentative ceasefire in 2002 and brings the divided country closer to total war.

The Sri Lankan Air Force responded later by bombing several rebel-held areas in other parts of the country. The Tigers are a separatist terrorist group seeking independence of certain areas in Sri Lanka and have been classified as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State.
“There is currently a trend in many conflicts towards increased use of command-detonated mines.”

State of Mine Action
The humanitarian impact of NSA mine use is mine to measure, since it takes place in a conflict situation, in areas where little or no mine action is taking place and where civilians may fear reporting mine incidents.”

NSA Involvement in Mine Action

Constitution

NSAs often confirm not only offensive but also defensive mine use. Indeed, according to a majority of NSAs, landmines are mainly utilized for defensive purposes. The Burmese Rehinga Solidarity Organization has admitted to using mines to defend its camps and bases as well as to protect its members from robbery or from the Bangladesh Army. The Chin National Front (Burma/Myanmar) has also admitted to using mines for self-defense, apparently for the insignificance of this kind of use.

Large areas of the world are not under the effective control of any state, a fact facilitating mineral use in such areas. Today, there is no need for NSAs or individuals to look for sources of mines since weapons, including mines, are plentiful and easily available, as in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia.

Differing NSAs have allegedly transferred to each other not only arms and explosives but also the knowledge and technology on how to manufacture landmines, as in Burma, Myanmar, India and the Philippines. There are also allegations that some transfers are of a more permanent character and include the joint running of camps. Indeed, it has been asserted on more than one occasion that there have been intense contacts between the NSAs in CPM and some Indian Maoists (CPI-M), including joint training.

Landmine use for economic purposes is not frequently reported, although this is probably due to underreporting rather than the invisibility of this kind of use. For example, Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) has sold minerals used to create landmines, whereas the Movement of the Democratic Forces of Colombia (M-19) have sold landmines to hinder the local population from benefiting from economically profitable land.

For nuisance mining, the most cited example is probably that of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. FARC allegedly implicated with the entrance of a town and in houses and vehicles before the army took over the area.

Impact of NSA Mine Use
The impact of NSA mine use is multiple and varies depending on the type of mine-use. However, it appears that mine use is more widely dispersed than state mine use and include weaponization that is usually less prone to map or mark their mines.

Technical knowledge on how to manufacture landmines is often available among NSAs.

However, since NSAs in many conflicts largely depend on these weapons, it appears unlikely that most of them would agree to a total ban on all landmines. Nevertheless, some NSAs have expressed an interest in banning these weapons.

Need for Prioritization
When engaging NSAs, priorities must be set to where and where to allocate scarce resources. If humanitarian actors target a group that is a frequent user and manage to involve it in the mine ban, the benefit for the population is greater; yet a sporadic user or non-user may be more open to re- nounce the use of mines in case of post-conflict situations. Understanding opposition patterns is essential, since these may have important consequences for the engagement and implementation of strategies for a mine ban. This may be particularly true in cases where regional dynamics appear to fuel the landmine problem or provide possibilities for its solution.

NSA involvement in mine action is difficult to measure, since there is a lack of reporting from the state and non-state actors in humanitarian demining and to encourage other NSAs to ban anti-personnel mines and get involved in humanitarian mine action in areas where NSAs operate and are in control, as encouraged in Action 46 of the Nairobi Action Plan. Given the benefits of mine action to the civilians, it is indispensable for the concerned governments to allow such actions.

NSAs are contributing to mine action in different areas around the world, notably in Sudan, Sri Lanka and Iraq. In addition, understanding regional patterns is essential, since these may have important consequences for the engagement and implementation of strategies for a mine ban. This may be particularly true in the case of the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where mine action in the past has been insufficient to meet the needs of the population.

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