February 2006

Hidden Killers in Afghanistan

Khair M. Sharif
Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
ammunition but unfortunately spread almost 50 pounds of toxic material over the demolition area due to depleted uranium in the mine fragmentation warheads.

When properly trained and experienced personnel are utilized in munitions disposal operations, munitions with unique hazards can be identified and separated for future disposition. During CEA operations in Iraq, contractors destroyed on average approximately 1 ton of assorted explosive ordnance with properly positioned donor material and one block of C4 explosives (1.25 pounds).

Finally, another organization complicated the securing and disposal of ordnance by instructing local Iraqis on how to dispose of certain munitions to recover the valuable components, such as brass rotating bands, copper shape-charge cones and, in some cases, the explosive material. This was done to start a “cottage industry” in order to provide a source of income for unemployed Iraqis. The precious metal was then sold to scrap dealers.

Environmental Threats

The environment also poses hazards to those not familiar with the area. As most would expect, the temperature can range from 110 to 125 degrees Fahrenheit (43 to 52 degrees Celsius). Propellant becomes very unstable at these temperatures, metal-cased ordnance becomes extremely hot to handle without gloves, and in some instances, explosives in munitions begin to soften and explode. Large amounts of water were essential in CEA operations during the hottest part of the year, not only for hydration, but also in the event of a leakage of white phosphorous munitions.

Another environmental factor to contend with in Iraq is leishmaniasis, which is an infection in both humans and animals transmitted by sand flies (not bats). Between August 2002 and February 2004, at least 522 cases of leishmaniasis were reported among U.S. military personnel who had served in northern Iraq.

While treatment is available for this disease, it is far less painful and inconvenient to use N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide (DEET) lotion or permethrin repellent to avoid being bitten by a sand fly.

Other environmental factors to contend with in Iraq are snakes and scorpions. There are five types of poisonous snakes indigenous to the country, several of which have venom that is fatal to humans. Of relevance to CEA operations is the fact that both snakes and scorpions are fond of shading themselves in stacks of munitions both outdoors and in ammunition bunkers and warehouses. No fatalities have occurred as a result of encounters, but there have been instances in which workers have required medical assistance after a snake sting.

Logistics

Prior to the current conflict, the Iraqi infrastructure was well-established with an extremely capable road network. Many supplies were shipped in from Kuwait, as well as some from Jordan as the intensity of the insurgency increased. The danger of transporting supplies that were obviously destined for Coalition Forces or civilian contractors created a very tenuous supply system. Many Iraqi, Turkish and Pakistani trucks were killed, injured or scared away because they were aiding in the reconstruction of Iraq in the post-Saddam era. This situation has made supplying CEA operations a formidable challenge.

Much has been written and discussed about the amount of ammunition that has not been destroyed in Iraq; however, little has been mentioned about the civilian CEA contractors who have accomplished a task never before attempted under fire. Their efforts have removed thousands of potential IEDs and weapons from the hands of the insurgents, protecting Coalition Forces and innocent Iraqis who simply want to live free from the oppressive Hussein regime.

In addition, by undertaking the CEA mission, the U.S. government has demonstrated its commitment to eliminating the hazards of explosive remnants of war. The United States will undoubtedly continue in this role as it moves forward in implementing the State Department’s new Weapons Removal and Abatement Services contract. These U.S. efforts will continue to properly dispose of explosive hazards and in the process provide a source of income to displaced civilians, but also the global environment.

See “References and Endnotes,” page 104

Years of demining and mine action operations have reduced the number of casualties in Afghanistan, and lives are beginning to improve. Yet about eight percent of the estimated 33,000 communities in the country continue to be impacted and 12 percent of those are considered high-impact communities.

By Khar M. Sharif (Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan)

Over 20 years of war have not only destroyed Afghanistan’s rural and urban infrastructure but also scattered landmines and unexploded ordnance throughout the country in urban and commercial areas, towns, roads, irrigation systems and canals, and farms and grazing land.

These hidden killers are an obstacle to resettlement and economic recovery in numerous mobile teams that collected or destroyed CEA and UXO. In 2003, George retired from the U.S. Army as a colonel after 30 years of service, having spent his last six years at the Pentagon as the Defense Department’s lead for humanitarian demining research and development. He now works as an independent consultant.

George Zaharzewski

807 Gateshead Road / Alexandria, VA 22308-4518 / USA

Tel: +1 703 792 8356
E-mail: GZaharzewski@gmail.com

Published by MU Scholarly Commons, 2006

If we look at the summary impact of the above achievements, MAPA has made a remarkable contribution toward the following:

• Increasing reintegration process, which has reduced external aid required to support refugees and IDPs.
• Reducing casualties and fatalities, which improves the safety and security of Afghan families.
• Increasing access for emergency, rehabilitation and development projects through clearance of access roads and clearance of areas in preparation for subsequent assistance projects.
• Increasing employment opportunities within the commercial sector through increased national productivity as well as for employees within mine action non-governmental organizations.
• Integrating more than 700 newly demobilised ex-combatants into MAPA as a part of the “Mine Action for Peace” initiative, done in direct collaboration with the government of Afghanistan.

Despite the significant achievements summarized above, according to the Landmine Impact Survey, there are 18,000 impacted communities (about 8 percent of the estimated 33,000 communities in the country), of which 281 are high-impact (12 percent), 480 are medium-impact (20 percent) and 1,607 are low-impact (68 percent).

The Mine Action Program for Afghanistan comprises the United Nations Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan and its area offices in seven different geographical regions of the country, as well as

Sharif: Hidden Killers in Afghanistan
implementing partners, both national and interna-
tional. U.N., non-governmental and commercial organisations
have been involved in mine action activities across the globe. Of
the 8,700 people in mine action operations in support of the
government's programme. Over the years, participating organisa-
tions have named Mine Action Planning Units (MAPUs) to
accommodate Ottawa Convention timelines, in order to
continue as this is written and release this data. By mid-2005, an
estimated area of over 1,200 hectares (5 square miles). The
current status of these 45 SMAs is shown in Figure 1. Fifty-three
percent of all SMAs in the three communities were cleared. An
dditional 42 percent were partially cleared. Only two SMAs were
not cleared at all. Partial clearing is defined as clearance of 50
percent to just over 900 hectares (3 square miles). The
remaining 15 percent were not cleared at all. Further ex-
amination of the clearance activity shows that partially
30 SMAs are mainly of larger size, and only critical areas have
been cleared.

Before the NLIS in 2000 there had been considerable
clearance by the Cambodian Mine Action Centre and the
Mines Advisory Group in these three communities. But since
2000, there has been very little official activity as the focus of
attention has shifted to other areas of the province. Figure 2 shows that CMAC worked in only two SMAs and cleared 5 percent
of the total cleared area; the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces
worked in three SMAs and cleared 7 percent of the
total area cleared; and MAG worked in only one in a
cooperative effort with RCAF. The total area cleared by all three organisations has been about 50 hectares (124 acres). What is most surprising is that fully 86 percent of the SMAs that have been cleared or partially cleared have been worked on by community-based individuals
or groups (see Figure 2). This represents an estimated 91
percent of the area cleared of mines/UXO in the same period (see Figure 3). One result of these findings is that Battambang MAPU
will try to compile a complete inventory of the mine history of all SMAs in the province. It is likely, by some time in 2006, the
Battambang MAPU and others in northwestern Cambodia will have such data available to them. Assistance with this effort is being provided from the “Task Assessment and Planning—Decision Support at MAPUs” project, funded by the Canadian International Development Assistance with this effort is being provided from the “Task Assessment and Planning—Decision Support at MAPUs” project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency and working in collaboration with the Australian government's Overseas Aid Program (AusAID)-funded project “Capacity Building for Mine Action Planning.”

Khan M. Shanef
Monitor, Evaluation and Training
Agency
Mine Action Programme for
Afghanistan
44 Donald Ave
Notiwota, ON L0M 1P0 / Canada
Tel: +1 705 444 2385
E-mail: xahn384@yahoo.com

Changes in Suspected Mined Areas, 2000–2005

One result of these findings is that Battambang MAPU
will try to compile a complete inventory of the mine history of all SMAs in the province. It is likely, by some time in 2006, the
Battambang MAPU and others in northwestern Cambodia will have such data available to them. Assistance with this effort is being provided from the “Task Assessment and Planning—Decision Support at MAPUs” project, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency and working in collaboration with the Australian government's Overseas Aid Program (AusAID)-funded project “Capacity Building for Mine Action Planning.”

Khan Mohammad Sharif grew up in Afghanistan and worked for
MAFA for 14 years before he left in early 2003 to pursue his Master of Business Administration at Preston
University. He continues to be involved in short-term research and development projects as active
consultan. t

Khan Mohammad Sharif grew up in Afghanistan and worked for
MAFA for 14 years before he left in early 2003 to pursue his Master of Business Administration at Preston
University. He continues to be involved in short-term research and development projects as active
consultan. t
A Regional Approach: Mine and UXO Risk Reduction in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, Wells-Dang [from page 34]

Further Reading

8. UXO Laos. Annual Report 2004. UXO Laos, PO. Box 545, Vientiane, Laos, PDR, Tel (050-21) 41486; Fax (050-21) 415746, E-mail: uxo@land.com.

Destroying the Mother of All Arsenals, Zhangczewsky [from page 18]

Endnotes


Hidden Killers in Afghanistan, Shariff [from page 20]

Endnotes

2. One square kilometer is approximately 0.386 square mile.

Observations on Recent Changes in Northwest Cambodia's Mine/UXO Situation, Simmonds, et. al. [from page 24]

Endnotes

1. LIS is an abbreviation for Level One Survey that is commonly used in Cambodia. This is not to be confused with L1S (Landmine Impact Survey), which is in common use in other parts of the world.

USAID's Perspective: The Importance of Social and Economic Developing Strategies for Humanitarian Mine Action, Feinberg [from page 41]

Endnotes


Mine Action and Development, Turcout [from page 43]

Endnotes

1. From the 2004 Nairobi Declaration by States Parties to the Ottawa Convention.
4. These individuals are often called landmine survivors. For a complete definition, see http://www.icbl.org/lm/2004/intro/survivor, accessed Dec. 13, 2005.

Integrated Mine Action: A Rights-Based Approach in Cambodia, Campbell [from page 45]

Endnotes


How Can Economists Contribute to Mine Action, Marsh [from page 51]

References