Goons, Lemons, and Saviors

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Goons, Lemons, and Saviors

by Dennis Barlow, Director, MAC

For about five years now, it has been accepted wisdom that the national mine action centers (MAC) are the critical nodes of humanitarian demining activity. MACs are at the forefront in deactivating landmines, with policy "coming down" and tactical results "going up." MAC managers are asked to implement standards, evaluate clearance techniques and equipment, integrate the various components of mine action (marking and monitoring, clearance, mine risk education, victim assistance), help prioritize programs and activities, answer to donors, report to the host government, provide information to the UN, and many other systems, fill empty databases, develop the perfect mix of mechanical, dog, sensor, and probing techniques—and oh, yes, by the way—clear and return vast amounts of land to productive use without any accidents or political turbulence.

The Human Factor

In encountering, and let's admit it, treating the problem of landmines as an elaborate and daunting maze, we may have often overlooked the most basic yet most important challenge to the success of the national mine clearance manager—dealing with people. I am reminded of the asion, which holds that while deriving truth is a vastly complicated process, when it is finally attained, it turns out to be dazzlingly simple. While attending the recent meeting of the Mine Action Directors' evening in Geneva I heard a refreshingly candid discussion of "lessons-learned" as a result of the UN mine action program in Kosovo. Dr. Dirk Salomons of the Praxis Group alluded to several categories of people which have to be dealt with during a demining operation: he labeled these groups as "goons," "lemons," and "saviors.

Of course, I found myself wondering why it has taken so long to discuss such basic personnel topics within the context of mine action operations. It was only an instant's reflection for me to realize that indeed, dealing with human behavior must be much more difficult to deal with when working against machines, data, or even policy. Finding, recruiting, training, integrating, promoting, dismissing, evaluating, rewarding, correcting and appreciating people are the most difficult tasks any manager can undertake, and layers of policies and procedures come down from the top in twenty-first-century America to make the mine action center manager's human resource responsibilities any easier. While I do not pretend to possess the wisdom for dealing with these three groups of people operationally, I believe that discussing them and their place in the demining environment may help crystallize the problem.

Tag the Goons

Goons are probably the easiest group to identify. Most notably they are the exploiters who directly exacerbate the landmine threat. They may be local arms merchants, salvage buyers, or others who trade in the business of landmines. They and their cousins, the terrorists, insectivores, geniuses, factons, thugs, and bullies are willing to spread human misery for their own selfish (or ideological—does it matter?) ends. Goons are often the purveyors of human misery, dispensing drugs, proscription and other forms of false hope, which are particularly afflicting to those who are amongst the greatest need. Goons have been identified, then shunned. To pretend they do not exist, or to ignore them, is to invite trouble. But moving them out and destroying their networks is the job of the government and its agencies. Goons must be kept isolated from the logisticians and other activities of the MACs. Getting information on these goons and being aware of their movements and methods can help mine action programs and the people they serve, avoid their traps and enticements.

Transorm or Terminate the Lemons

Lemons present the most immediate impediments to successful operations. Lemons are those people ostentatiously out to do good, but who for a variety of reasons, are not performing the duties of their jobs. Many of these do not even know that they are working on landmines, nor are they able to deal with the reality of their tasks. They are people who are not working, or who are working, but who are not making any contribution. They are the laziest ones who will falsify data rather than to take the effort to collect it accurately, they are more concerned with being served than serving. Often they are the critics who would rather find fault with one another than to take the initiative for themselves. For one reason or another they are the unreliable element of the teams, late for work, performing inconsistent service and putting the burden on other team members.

Some lemons need to be identified and relieved from mine action as soon as possible. A few or even all of these people create tremendous backlog and confusion for the rest of the team. They must be identified or terminated.

Edify your Saviors

Finally, there are the saviors: the team members who enjoy work in humanitarian demining activity. It is not hard to see that there are those who are true professionals, who never tire of the challenge, who take satisfaction in the job, who are always willing to assist others. These are the people who will get the job done. They are the people who are the greatest source of pride in our industry. To help move the saviors into the team, one must be willing to work long hours. The leadership must be present, must be assiduous in addressing the needs of the team, and must be willing to accept the realities of the job. The saviors are the people who will do the job with dedication, who will be willing to work long hours, who will be willing to work in the heat, who will be willing to work in the cold, who will be willing to work in the rain. The saviors are the people who will do the job.

The goal of the manager, therefore, is to take these team members and allies

Indian Farmland Converted into Mine Fields

In early January, Indian soldiers began placing mines in farmlands on the border of India and Pakistan in anticipation of a continued conflict with the neighboring country. This mining process has greatly disrupted farmers living on these lands. Women and children have been relocated, while the men struggle to salvage what little cultivable land they have been encouraged to hang on to. For those who have lost their lands, these farmers have nowhere else to go and do not want to leave the land where they have been living. This mine-laying process rendered over 80 percent of the country's agricultural land unusable after Indian Army officials and the Border Security Force littered it with mines. Additionally, the areas have proved hazardous to both soldiers and civilians, with several deaths and injuries occurring in the few weeks after the mines' placement. Some estimate the new mine fields to be up to one and a quarter miles wide along the 1,800-mile border separating the two disputed nations.

Tokyo Conference Leads to Demining Funds for Afghanistan

Representatives of 24 countries and international organizations attended the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan on January 21-22, 2002. These officials pledged a total of $27.2 million (U.S.) for a rapid and concentrated demining effort. Interim Prime Minister of Afghanistan Hamid Karzai stated, "The need for action is great. Our citizens are falling victim to [mines] daily." Much of the money donated to Afghanistan for these efforts help create jobs; the demining field currently serves as the country's largest single source of employment. Some of the money will go to UNICEF, who will implement an education plan to begin in March, when Afghan schools reopen. The funds are also greatly needed since much of the demining equipment already in the country was stolen, vandalized or destroyed, according to officials.

Engineer Fulfills Vision of Helping Cambodian Children

Several years ago, engineer Kiyoshi Anemiyawa returned from a business trip in Cambodia, troubled by the images of the many young Cambodian landmine victims he had seen there. He decided to put his engineering skills to work and had four of his employees create a mine sweeper. After five years of trial and error, the team had successfully turned a hydraulic shovel into a mobile device to safely explode buried landmines. The machine completed its first sweep in 1999 and was displayed at the Third Meeting of States Parties held in Managua, Nicaragua, in September 2001. The company now has five landmine sweepers being used in countries such as Afghanistan, Cambodia and Nicaragua.

Landmine News Around the World

United Kingdom (UK) Company Revises Plans for Mine Detection

The UK Company (PipeHawk) has developed a groundbreaking landmine detection system that uses Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR). GPR is primarily used to keep track of underground pipelines and cables, but PipeHawk saw the potential of the technology for other applications. The system they have developed is designed to be attached to the side of a manned or remotely controlled vehicle. After passing the initial testing phases, the system was sent to Bosnia for final tests in a live mine field that will run through May 2002.

Currently, PipeHawk is seeking partners in the commercial or charity sphere to help fund the project. The company provides some of its own resources and receives help from the European Union as well, but managing director Mike Bushell is afraid this will not be enough, saying, "We really need someone in the defense arena... to take it on and help get it out into the market."

Kenya Makes Plans to Dispose of 35,000 Landmines

In February 2002, Kenya submitted a report to the United Nations stating that the country has 38,774 mines and will destroy all but 3000 of these next year. The report was submitted in accordance with Article 7 of the Mine Ban Treaty, which Kenya has already signed and ratified. The mines will be destroyed at Archer's Post military range through the use of "electrical and manual detonation methods."

Vietnam War Shell Explosives in Woman's Kitchen

In just one of several recent incidents caused by Vietnam War-era UXO, a housewife from the Dong Thap province suffered serious burns after a shell exploded in her kitchen. She had reportedly been using the shell to stabilize a cooking pot. Only a week before the incident, two children had been killed and another seriously injured when a fragmentation bomb also from the Vietnam War exploded in the central Vietnamese province of Quang Binh.

Robots Will Crush Landmines Without Detection

In November 2002, Japanese computer optics company Coz Co developed a robot designed to detect and destroy landmines without detecting them. When it comes upon a mine, the robot detonates what type of mine it is, covers it, and then crushes it with a high-velocity, hydraulically operated hammer. The machine reportedly detects and disposes of mines 10 times faster than humans. Coz Co began developing the robot in 2000, and it hopes to have it operating in various types of terrain by the end of this year.
Technology in the Mine Field

Get the user involved at the start—what do they need? Decide what you can do. Get potential donors involved. Do controlled testing. Do testing with the users. Complete the loop by connecting the users and the donors. And always make sure that your data is not contaminated by a real or perceived conflict of interest.

There is one final failure in the successful insertion of technology into the mine field: the failure of communication. The labs and the manufacturers often fail to get their message across and the end-user community remains unaware of what new or improved technology is out there. Just as importantly, the end users often fail to communicate their needs except in general terms. The labs and the companies often cannot figure out what they are shooting for. In June 2001, CCWAT sponsored a conference that addressed this very issue. Improved mechanisms for information exchange are being developed but they will only work if both sides participate. The technology developers have to present their information and seek out the participation of suitable end-users. Meanwhile, the user community needs to present both its needs and the results of its real-world experience and tests. Only when both sides connect to an ever-evolving information exchange will we overcome this final hurdle.

Can technology deliver? No. But technology can be designed. CCWAT's program is one example of how it can work.■

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From the Director's Desk

From different methodological approaches in a unit to which all are identical, but all are in synchronisation. Not only does the manager have to integrate the varying skills and mind-sets of his crew and support units, but he also has to plan and carry out a system of rewards, promotions and notices of a job well done. I am amazed at the saying, which the publics often use (and which unfortunately, is too often true), that laments that a typical project will: "punish the innocent, reward the guilty, and promote the non-participant." Would it be good if we could actually turn that phrase on its head and see it as the hero, the steadfast and the loyal be remunerated, recognised, rewarded? Nearly everyone, regardless of motivation, appreciates recognition. The smart manager will give great attention to identifying and paying tribute to his subsystems.

The premise for this column is that focusing on basic human resources is a simple truth. It is indeed a core concept, easily understood, but certainly not easy to accomplish. Not only will human nature baffle and perplex the manager, but he will find that administrative procedures, human resource policies, cultural concerns, the immediacy of everyday operational problems and the numerous demands of time management are all natural enemies in planning and conducting an aggressive successful "people-oriented" program. However, what must be borne in mind is that no matter how well-briefed the equipment, how well-trained the dog, how smooth the logistics, how precise the GPS, how generous the donor, how firm the stan-

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