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Kosovo, After the UNMACC and Beyond

Over the past few years, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre (UNMACC) has transferred mine action responsibilities to national organizations and local entities. The following article discusses how a number of different agencies within Kosovo are working together in various capacities to address mine action issues.

by Steve Saunders, Chief of EOD Management Section, UNMIK

Background

After the end of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing campaign and the cessation of hostilities in the province of Kosovo, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) mandated the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) to implement a mine action program in Kosovo. On June 17, 1999, the responsibility for mine action in Kosovo was handed to UNMACC under UN resolution 1244.

UNMACC

From June 17, 1999, to December 15, 2001, UNMACC took on the responsibility of managing and coordinating humanitarian mine clearance operations in Kosovo. During the emergency and consolidation phases of the mine action program, up to 17 accredited NGOs and commercial companies worked in Kosovo with support from the Kosovo Forces (KFOR), the humanitarian community and international donors. In the two and a half years of existence in Kosovo, UNMACC mine action programs accomplished the following:

- Destroyed 24,972 AT and AP mines
- Destroyed 8,485 cluster munitions
- Destroyed 13,890 items of UXO
- Cleared 52,226,187 square metres of land

However, since the start of the mine action program in Kosovo, there were also 459 reported incidents involving mines and items of UXO, which resulted in 95 deaths and 364 people sustaining serious injuries.

Timeline for Transfer of Responsibility

June 2001

In June 2001, an assessment of the situation concluded that the mine action program was at the point where the national capacity could take on the continued clearance of UXO and mines and eventually the role of explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) response. The decision was made to transfer responsibility for UXO and mine clearance to the national capacity, the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC). As soon as this decision was agreed upon, an exit strategy was drawn up between UNMACC and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

December 2001

On December 15, 2001, the transfer of responsibility moved from UNMACC to UNMIK. At the time of the transfer, the Kosovo mine action program had cleared 619 of the 620 known Serbian Army (VJ) minefield records and as a minimum conducted clearance to some degree on the 224 reported NATO cluster munitions. This was the start of a new era in mine action in Kosovo. As the focal point for EOD matters, the EOD management section is responsible for:

- Operational coordination and management of all mine action activities, including mine clearance operations, and the development of a capacity.
- The development of the KPC EOD response capacity and continued training and supervision of the KPC EOD teams.
- Public information and mine action outreach (MRE) relating to the alpha UXO threat and the appropriate action to be taken by the public.
- Victim assistance in conjunction with the KPC.

Victim Assistance

MRE is the government institute that is the focal point for data collection on any new victims of mines or UXO. Both the MRE and the public information assistant are responsible for assisting the MRE in gathering data and investigating incidents as they occur, as well as ensuring confidentiality of the victim’s data. When necessary, they will also visit victims and their families to provide reports, feedback and continued support.

Other Areas of Achievement

In March 2003, the MRE and public information assistants conducted a Kosovo-wide “Needs Assessment” with a local NGO, ARKA. This “Needs Assessment” has highlighted the best type of media to reach the majority of the population and areas where MRE and public information have not been previously provided. The MRE and public information assistants also completed the “Safer Village Plan” and the “Normal Life” projects that were started by the UNMACC in 2001.

Information Management and IMSMA

Kosovo was the first mine action programme to have an IMSMA system, which was developed by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). The IMSMA system and the MRE programme are assisting with any UXO or mine clearance that has been conducted in Kosovo in its database.

Within the government bodies that were sealed with the new rules were not trained or equipped in the early stages of the transfer. The EOD management section also suffered slightly due to restructuring within UNMIK and the office responsible went through three name changes within nine months. However, since September 19, 2002, the EOD management section has been working within the OKPCC.

OKPCC EOD Management Section

Under existing arrangements, the EOD management section consists of two international personnel and five local staff. The two international employees fill the roles of Operations Officer and QA Officer and the five national staff posts are:

- Two QAs assistants
- One MRE assistant
- One Mine Public Information assistant
- One Data Entry clerk/audio operator

Mine Risk Education (MRE)

The long-term strategy to keep the population safe is effective MRE and public information on the residual threat, and the appropriate action to be taken by the public upon finding a suspicious object or finding themselves in a dangerous area. The MRE assistant coordinates MRE in schools in conjunction with MEST. The MRE assistant also monitors and reports on the KPC community liaison teams and delivers MRE messages to any community or government institute that requests it.

Public Information

The public information assistant delivers public information through the media in conjunction with the UNMIK public information department, KFOR and the KPC. The public information assistant is also responsible for the collection, investigation and validation of all information pertaining to UXO and mines found by the public in Kosovo.

Kosovo Protection Corps (KFOR)
The KPC is a civil protection organisation that has been working in Kosovo since February 2000. They are split into various subdivisions such as Communications, Emergency Preparedness, Training and Doctrine, and Ex-Services Repair and Engineering. The KPC EOD teams are all members of the engineering unit known as the KPC, which is a designated as a Protection Zone. There are currently six Protection Zones within the Province of Kosovo, with each having an EOD team and the headquarters of the engineers also having an EOD team making seven teams in total.

Current KPC EOD Team Capabilities

Each KPC EOD team consists of 15 team members, which includes:

- One team leader
- Two deputy team leaders
- Eight EOD team members
- Two paramedics
- One dedicated ambulance driver
- One Community Liaison Officer/LTO

**KPC CDO**

In order that the local communities are both aware and satisfied with the clearance work that is being conducted by the KPC EOD teams, 15 members of the KPC have been trained by ARKA in Community Liaison. Each CDO informs the community about the work conducted by the KPC in their area. The CLO will inform the head of the village or landowner around them, organise a community meeting in the area, so that as many people as possible are informed about what areas are clear.

KPC Training and Supervision

The KPC teams training is organised and developed by the OKPC. EOD management section and currently delivered by Handicap International (HI). HI was chosen to train the KPC as they have a proven record in national capacity building. In late 2001, and early 2002, the KPC was trained in demining, basic area clearance (BAC) and limited EOD response. In early 2003 HI conducted a number of refresher courses in BAC, and basic demining prior to any clearance operations taking place. HI plans to continue the training and development of the KPC for the foreseeable future. HI also provides international supervisors and national monitors to the site on a daily basis as well as acting as a liaison between the KPC, KFOR, and the OKPC. In addition to this supervision and monitoring role, HI also provides an additional 13-person BAC team, which is currently funded by UNMAS. The HI team works independently of the KPC on BAC sites in conjunction with the Kosovo clearance plan.

Future Capability of the KPC EOD Teams

KFOR is downsizing their troop strength in Kosovo and the KPC will continue to take over the role of EOD response from KFOR in the future. By the end of 2004, the KPC should have a fully functional operations cell that can mirror the EOD operations sections in Pristina. The EOD teams should be capable of up-arming and training quicker EOD response teams that can operate Kosovo wide and are able to dispatch within 48 hours. The KPC should be able to conduct technical surveys to verify or discredit the presence of any items of UXO or mines reported by members of the public or land conflict. This is an ongoing process.

The OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) in conjunction with the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD) signed an agreement in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, at the end of May that will expand the first internationally-supported mine action program in Tajikistan. The following article provides a brief discussion of the landmine situation in Tajikistan and the goals of the new mine action project.

By Kevin Danserea, MAIC and Ian Clarke, FSD

Background to Landmine Problems in Tajikistan

In 1997, Tajikistan was classified as a mine-affected country after a civil war within Tajikistan that led to mines being laid throughout the country. The landmines left behind from the conflict have impacted local farmers and the general population in Tajikistan and led to thousands of casualties and injuries. In addition, the number of landmines has been set at both the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan border as well as the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border. The KPC has acknowledged placing landmines along Tajikistan borders, with approval of the Tajikistan government, in order to prevent unwanted terrorists from entering the area.

The most serious threat to Tajikistan is the popular anti-mining organisation named Deputy Prime Minister Zubanov. During these meetings it was requested that the EOD assist the government in the following ways:

- Request to the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICH) for their assistance in providing the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMS) database systems
- Assistance with the establishment of a National Mine Action Coordination Structure
- Donor mobilization
- Training, recruitment and equipment for two survey teams and two clearance teams
- Capacity building for national staff at all levels

For the latter part of 2002, the FSD sent a number of missions to Tajikistan to continue liaison between the donor communities and update government representatives on the progress of such activities as well as to propose future projects. In addition, following a request by the Tajik government, the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe initiated a process involving international agencies and governments that explained the interest in supporting mine action in Tajikistan.
Since FY 1995, the United States has provided more than $21,545,000 in humanitarian demining assistance to the Caucasian region. This money has supported the training and equipping of deminers in all three countries, including more than 100 deminers in Azerbaijan, 97 in Armenia and 45 in Georgia. The United States has also provided training on MRE, emergency medical treatment, communications and special courses of instruction for survey personnel.

Azerbaijan

During the 1988–1994 conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Azerbaijan occupied nearly 20 percent of Azerbaijan's territory. As a result, the Azerbaijani National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) estimates that more than 60 million square meters of land are contaminated by mines and UXO, including 64 villages in 11 districts—primarily in the Fuzuli and Xankendi regions.

The United States has supported ANAMA since 2000, contributing over $6 million to the demining effort. In 2002, Azerbaijan began its first mine clearance operation with the United States. The Armenian deminers surveyed and marked over 700,000 square meters of land, and cleared approximately 5,500 square meters of land in a village that was heavily shelled during the country's internal conflict.

In FY 2003, the United States will provide over $5 million to the demining effort in Armenia. U.S. funds channeled through the ITF for management training conducted by Cranfield University. In February 2003, the United States, assisted by the Armenian Demining Cadre, began training a second demining company, another MDD section and four additional medics in Basic and Advance Trauma Life Support. The Center also received an Armed Personnel Carrier (BTR-60) mounted hull for mechanical demining and will soon begin training operators and mechanics. Armenia also recently completed five months of MRE training in the areas of questionnaires, survey design and analysis. The Armenian Humanitarian Demining Center has progressed quickly and as a result, the U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program aims to eventually reduce funding gaps and place the country in the self-sustaining phase by the end of 2004.

Georgia

During the 1992–93 conflict between the Georgians and Abkhaz forces, an unknown number of AT mines and AP mines, all of Soviet origin, were laid across four regions of Abkhazia. Unfortunately, neither side kept accurate records or maps during the conflict. HALO Trust estimates that there are 15,000–20,000 mines in Georgia based on the density, patterns and depth of the minefields. After the conflict, the United States, in cooperation with the United Nations, began its first mine clearance operation in Abkhazia.

In FY 2003, the United States will provide over $2.8 million to clear approximately 18 million square meters of land are deemed dangerous. Of this area, HALO has classified five million square meters that require Priority 1 or 2 clearance. To date, nearly 1.9 million square meters have been cleared and 4,117 AP mines, 401 AT mines and 631 cactus mines of UXO have been located and destroyed. This clearance totals about 40 percent of Priority 1 and 2 land. The remainder of the Priority 1 and 2 tasks are expected to take an additional two to three years to complete. The Priority 3 and 4 mined areas, which amount to about 13 million square meters of land, will require a considerably longer amount of time and may only be cleared if funding is available.

Future U.S. Plans in the Region

In June 2003, the director of the U.S. DOS Humanitarian Mine Action Program visited countries in southeastern Europe receiving U.S. assistance and met with the Director of the ITF to discuss future plans in the region. Currently, approximately 18 million square meters of land are deemed dangerous. Of this area, HALO has classified five million square meters that require Priority 1 or 2 clearance. To date, nearly 1.9 million square meters have been cleared and 4,117 AP mines, 401 AT mines and 631 cactus mines of UXO have been located and destroyed. This clearance totals about 40 percent of Priority 1 and 2 land. The remainder of the Priority 1 and 2 tasks are expected to take an additional two to three years to complete. The Priority 3 and 4 mined areas, which amount to about 13 million square meters of land, will require a considerably longer amount of time and may only be cleared if funding is available.

Future Vision for Kosovo

In the future, the responsibility for UXO and mine clearance in Kosovo will be transferred from UNMIK to the national authorities with the KPC EOD teams taking on the responsibility for EOD response when KFOR has concluded its mandate. The KPC EOD teams training and development is progressing to a point where it is hoped that by the end of 2004 the EOD management section will be able to handle over operational control of the day to day running of the EOD teams to the KIC Chief Engineer. It is hoped that the local government will be able to reduce the number of dangerous areas which will have been surveyed and either credited or reduced to EOD response tasks, and MRE and public information messages, targets at schools will help reduce the number of incidents, especially those that involve children.

Clearance Sice Transfer of Responsibilities

Since the transfer of responsibilities in 2001, the KPC EOD teams and UNMIK have cleared the following types of ordnance:

- 11 AT and AP mines
- 257 cluster munitions
- 33 items of UXO

In Kosovo, there have been reports that the local population conducted a certain amount of post-conflict clearance. Exact numbers removed from these programs are difficult to estimate, however, as they did not record their clearance numbers and many locals worked independently of any organization and often for rent.

Since the ITF establishment in 1998, the ITF, the United States, other donors, and the regions mine-affected countries have worked hand in hand to reduce and eliminate the horrible impacts of landmines and UXO. The U.S. partnership with the ITF and the donor community will continue to demonstrate support for regional cooperation and will encourage similar partnerships in the future.

All graphics courtesy of author.

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Clearance Since Transfer of Responsibilities

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U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program in the Balkans and Caucasus

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