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Mine Action Clearance Operations Set to Begin in Tajikistan

Kevin Dansereau  
*Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)*

Ian Clarke  
*Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD)*

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Landmines in Europe & the Caucasus

information can then be displayed by superimposing the information onto mapping using various themes to represent the types of UXO and mine clearance that has been, or will be conducted. One of the functions of the UNMIK EOD management section is the administration of the IMSMA system. KFOR and sections of the humanitarian community have been using IMSMA since it was first introduced in 1999. Any new information regarding dangerous areas that are reported by KFOR or areas that are cleared by the KPC or NGOs can be entered into the system and updated immediately.

KPC

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 Disaster Risk Reduction and Engineering. The KPC EOD teams are all members of the engineering unit and are known as a Protection Zone. There are currently six Protection Zones within the Province of Kosovo. Each Protection Zone has an EOD team and the headquarters of the engineers also have an EOD team making seven teams in total.

Current KPC EOD Team Capability

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

• One team leader
• Two deputy team leaders
• Eight full-time members
• Two paramedics
• One dedicated ambulance driver

One Community Liaison Officer (CLO) informs the community about the work conducted by the KPC in their area. The CLO will inform the head of the village or landowner about when to 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 are trained and developed by the OKPEC 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, bulk area clearance (BAC) and limited EOD response. In early 2003 HI conducted a number of refresher courses in BAC and basic demolitions 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 teams on a daily basis as well as acting as a liaison between the KPC, KFOR and the OKPEC. In addition to this supervision and monitoring role, HI also provides training to 16-person BAC teams, which is currently funded by UNMAS. The HI team works independently of the KPC's own 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 responsibility from KFOR in the future. By the end of 2004, the KPC should have a fully functional operations cell that mirrors the EOD management sections in Pristina. The EOD teams should be capable of conducting BAC operations throughout Kosovo when not employed in EOD vector tasks and be capable of conducting technical surveys to verify or discredit the presence of any items of UXO or mines reported by members of the public on land that is having a socioeconomic impact on the population in the Province of Kosovo.

Current Situation (Mid-June 2003)

Currently in Kosovo, there are 129 dangerous areas which require a minimum of either a technical survey or some form of mine or BAC. However, these dangerous areas are not new; in fact, 126 of these were handed over to UNMIK when the UNMACK transferred responsibility to KFOR in June 2001. The majority of these dangerous areas are contaminated with subsurface cluster munitions dropped in the 1999 Kosovo war. In 1999, the remaining dangerous areas contain mines and items of UXO. Additionally, there are over 50 suspicious areas that require a technical survey to discern or verify the presence of any mines or UXO. These areas have been reported by KFOR, the ICRC, and members of the public to the EOD management section in the last 18 months. These areas have not been previously known to the UNMACK.

There are still areas within Kosovo that are affected by mines and UXO and although there has been a gradual decline in the number of victims over the last two years since the conclusion of the UNMACK, there are incidents reported on a regular basis, mostly notably incidents involving children. In 2002, the EOD management section and the IPI gathered continued on page 5

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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, on the end of May that will begin 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 Dansereau, 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 are a threat to the local farmers and the general population in Tajikistan's arid landmine-affected areas. In addition, mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) have been set along the Tajikistan-Kyrgyzstan border as well as the border between Tajikistan and the then Soviet Union. In 1997, the government of Tajikistan was suffering from a National Mine Action Strategy. The FSD Director held meetings with international organizations and government representatives, including the Deputy Prime Minister Zuhurov for the assistance of the GICH in clearing contaminated areas. In May 29, 2003, the FSD signed an agreement with the OSCE to establish the first Humanitarian Mine Action program in Tajikistan. OSCE funded 40 percent of the program spending, the rest of the program was paid for by the Canadian government, the Interpeace Foundation, and the Swiss government. These initial funds will ensure the deployment of two survey teams, who will start surveying in the area of the project. The survey teams are supported by the OSCE in accordance with the Tajik Mine Action Plan.

On June 20, 2003, the FSD signed an agreement with the government of the Republic of Tajikistan, which sets the parameters of the working relations between both parties. The data collection and the assignment of the FSD is ongoing. The first report is expected in 2004, with the end of the project.

Steps Being Taken to Offset Landmine Problems in Tajikistan

The International Committee of the Red Cross invited the FSD to Tajikistan in early 2002 to carry-out an assessment mission to look at ways that the FSD could assist the government of Tajikistan establish a National Mine Action Strategy. The FSD Director held meetings with international organizations and government representatives, including the Deputy Prime Minister Zuhurov for the assistance of the GICH in clearing contaminated areas. In May 29, 2003, the FSD signed an agreement with the OSCE to establish the first Humanitarian Mine Action program in Tajikistan. OSCE funded 40 percent of the program spending, the rest of the program was paid for by the Canadian government, the Interpeace Foundation, and the Swiss government.

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Victim Assistance in Iraq

Continuing presence in central and southern Iraq since the first Gulf War in 1991, during their first few years in Iraq, they provided mine clearance and demining, as well as food storage and logistics for over 300,000 people per month. They also provided logistical support and assistance to other UN agencies. CARE’s work in Iraq began in the northern Kurdish regions of Kirkuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah and in parts of central and southern regions such as Anbar, Basrah, Dhi Qar and Najaf. As humanitarian need became more pronounced in the central and southern regions of the mid-1990s, CARE’s focus turned more toward providing these areas with health care, clean water and proper sanitation.

Conclusion

As expected, the recent conflict brought a serious humanitarian concern to the civilian population of Iraq. Large amounts of explosive remnants of war (ERW) such as artillery shells, grenades, mortars bombs, cluster bombs and other submunitions, rockets and missiles left in residential areas cause the number of victims to increase daily. Those dedicated to helping these victims must first create a matrix of tracking the number of victims and the nature of their injuries. Their second concern is finding a secure way in which to deliver or administer medical or mental assistance. Finally, they must train Iraqi specialists, medical workers, and civilians in various areas to help reduce the number of victims in a self-sufficient Iraqi health care system. Despite these hurdles, the UN and NGOs are slowly making progress in their efforts to heal the wounded in Iraq.

References

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