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The BHMAC: A New Law, New Structure and New Hope in Bosnia

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The only way to sort out the problem was to create the law that will free information flow and get the system running.

Need to Have

So what could be a solution to have an information system and have data entered into it? First, an absolute necessity is to have clear, well-defined procedures providing as much data as possible and, if possible, have it organized in such a way that they can be entered into an information system with a lot of predefined values. In order to emphasize the importance of certain fields, it is advisable to have some fields that must be entered as a condition to proceed.

Another problem is how to keep the entered information. Our experience shows that there are two solutions either not delete records (just declare them cancel) or have well-formed and carefully programmed routines for record deletion. Over time and with the expansion of activities, it becomes obvious that some sort of quintessential functionality has to be implemented, and ideally, there should be a printed journal file (log book for major changes).

A need to have a chance to educate and educate staff is more related to program managers, as they often forget the simple fact that one may gain knowledge only through trial and error, and also by attending seminars. This is not only more cost-effective, but it also creates a sense of importance for the staff and in the long run creates a better environment and more effective employees.

Besides the problems mentioned so far, there are also some points that simply cannot be over looked. When the staff moves, things are forgotten. Being (at least in Bosnia) the first organization in place of a demining information system, the staff educated during the process become an asset desired by other companies. By rule, salaries reflect funding, and it is difficult to keep an integrity staff together.

Another problem is purely physical: paper copies are inclined to disappear or get lost. Information by manipulation. With luck (from the program's point of view), the amount of activities is growing and the paper archive is growing, which means more data to enter. A solution would be to scan all the reports and to use the scanned images as information carriers. Statements that say that minefield data report loss data their importance with time are simply wrong. In the end, they become the only written proof of contamination. A survey report, while an expert's opinion, is still just an opinion on the possible mine risk for certain areas.

Prioritization and the Information System

It is not always easy to find a mathematic algorithm to define priorities. Sometimes even scoring does not help. However, the complicated state structure reflects processes for priority definition. Also, the term "impact" can be understood in many different ways. Speaking of complexity, here is a Bosnia and Herzegovina state structure equation:

\[ 1 \text{ State} \times 1 \text{ Entity (City)} \times 10 \text{ Canton(s)} \times 14 \text{ Governments} \]

Taking into consideration the fact that real executive authority lies in municipalities (more than 120), it becomes obvious why priorities cannot be defined based just on some "points."

Through six years of data collection, we learned that where the mines are and the real impact of them on the population and society is the question. The problem is that priorities have to reflect needs and be part of plans for development as desired by authorities. Otherwise it's simply not working.

Southeastern Europe Approach

In order to have a broader scope and to share experience with neighboring countries, we used an approach kindly provided by the European Commission (EC) to start a project on regional data sharing. So far, the beneficiaries of the project are the following countries in southeastern Europe (SEE) regions: Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Albania, Macedonia, and Austria—and this list is likely to expand.

So far, we have sent four experts to the Joint Research Center and information interchange has proven possible. Based on data inconsistency, it becomes obvious that some sort of standardization has to take place. Thus, we agreed on standard hardware and software packages. In order to be able to show data for the region on a single map, we agreed on basics for use of the satellite images, and we have images provided for the region.

Prior to the information interchange, we had a four-day meeting in Sarajevo yielding some information interchange core standards for SEE. Based on experiences gained through these activities, exported data sent could be harmonized. Once a standard for information interchange is provided, information can be interchanged. An exercising exercise helped a lot because some of the mistakes became visible. "A house cleaning" was necessary. More than that, countries within the region are helping each other sort out problems. A good illustration of this is the BHMAC's GPS campaign in Albania.

Since all participants provided data without problems, SEE could be used as an example of equality in diversity. In fact, the once "one-size-does-not-fit-all" philosophy is accepted, it is considerably easy to achieve awareness on information-sharing benefits.

Having seen all aspects of information sharing and cooperation, I think it is time for the Global Information Exchange Standard for mine action. We fully support the Mine Action Enabling Markup Language (mXML) initiative, which becomes more and more accepted as a standard protocol for information interchange.*

Endnotes

1. Results of the conference can be seen at http://www.bhmac.org/bhmac/info/conferences/conference_e.html

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The BHMAC:
A New Law, New Structure and New Hope in Bosnia

After years of struggling with an inefficient mine action structure, a new demining law has revised the Bosnia-Herzegovina Mine Action Center (BHMAC). Bosnia's finally have the means to conquer their landmine troubles.

by JJ Scott, MAIC

Introduction

A new law enacted in March of 2002 marked the beginning of a Bosnian mine action Renaissance that will improve everything from national program management to individual minefield processes. A complete re-structuring and reorganization of the Bosnia-Herzegovina Mine Action Center (BHMAC) will finally allow the "head of Bosnia mine action to effectively direct the bodies beneath it, and to responsibly report to the government through the Demining Commission. The Bosnian government formulated the demining law and will help fund its implementation—an extraordinary step toward its goal of effective national program ownership. The new law and the structures it creates finally give Bosnian mine action practitioners a management system that is attuned to their own culture and unique landmine situation—indestructible weapons in the struggle to free their nation from the landmines holding it hostage.

History/War

Over three years of fighting (1992–1995) among several different armies along undulating front lines left "a very complicated and extensive [landmine] problem in a complex environment," says Mr. David Rowe, Program Manager of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and advisor to the BHMAC, Demining Commission and International Board of Donors. Mr. Rowe moved to Bosnia during the war and has been involved in Bosnian mine action since the beginning. He has survived the BHMAC's progress from mine action side-show to center-stage attraction.

To appreciate the turnaround now taking place, some background is necessary. Mr. Rowe describes the mine threat left by the war as "quite complex because of its extent, because of its low density and because of its random nature," making "the landmine problem here less quantifiable than in other parts of the world."

Knowing refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) would soon try returning home, the United Nations set up a mine action center in 1996. The international community decided that Bosnians should run their own mine action program, handing over all responsibilities on July 1, 1998. The Bosnian inherited a structure that was "a development program in a 100 percent task-oriented environment—a decision perhaps more designed to accommodate political needs than immediate practical post-war considerations," says Mr. Rowe. Under that structure, the State-level BHMAC was essentially subservient to the two relatively autonomous Entity MACs (one representing the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and one for the Republic of Srpska), effectively preventing it from wading any real managerial influence over demining operations. Many in Bosnia feel that the United Nations funded the program over to Bosnian authorities a bit too late, before either the MAC or the Bosnian government was ready.

By late 2000, a budget crisis created and exacerbated by allegations of corruption and mismanagement at the highest
levels left the three MACs on the verge of collapse. Demining and surveying op-
erations slowed dramatically. In a drastic (but not completely uncalled for) move, the High Representative dismissed the three-man Demining Commission, cit-
ing corruption and misuse of influence. It was a highly visible step of the otherwise shadowy affliction lurking through government corridors, covertly vamping the MACs' dedicated staffs of their ability to manage life-saving mine action activities—the organization's ultimate
mandate. Mr. Rowe feels "the national team should be commended for keeping the show alive and going for-
ward—albeit slowly" during this period.

New Hope

"Sometimes things have to be at the brink of collapse—it has to be very clear to all involved that things are not well—before you can get positive change and head in the right direction," Mr. Rowe remarks, looking back at that critical pe-
riod. The Bosnian government realized that much of its economic, health care, infrastructure and redevelopment woes were related to leftover landmines, and they finally made a concerted effort to address the problem with a logical, legiti-
mously Bosnian solution. The Bosnian mine action structure needed replace-
ment, not refurbishment, and in early 2001 work started on a law that would create a new, tenable organization. With considerable foreign encouragement, law-
makers hashed out the details over the next few months, and the legislature ap-
pproved Bosnia’s landmark Demining Law in March 2002.

Management Level

The law centralized management and development functions—formerly shared and/or fought over by the two Entity MACs—within the BHMAC, leaving day-to-day operational decisions to subordinate offices in Sarajevo (the Federation) and Banja Luka (the Repub-
lic). Mr. Dusan Gavran, newly-appointed Director of the BHMAC, believes that this new arrangement will yield several tangible benefits. "Before, the entity gov-
ernments dictated priorities. Nothing was coordinated. Now, one ministry-level de-
partment will rule over the two governments. The Entity governments will submit priorities, and all informa-
tion will be concentrated in one spot. The Bosnian council of ministers will then decide the priorities." This should in-
crease communication and cooperation between the Entities and the BHMAC, but if they can't reach an agreement on
priorities, the central BHMAC will al-
ways have the last word.

Since most functions previously car-
ried out by the Entity MACs are now under the BHMAC's jurisdiction, many people had to update their business cards as their jobs, offices and titles changed.
"Often, the person who was performing a certain function simply transferred that function to a new system, perhaps not even in a new office," remarks Mr. Rowe. He adds, "This was not designed to be an under the current contract. Mr. Rowe feels a basic operational structure has per-
formed reasonably well. He continues, "When we really have in Bosnia is a com-
petency to handle one of the elements of mine action: clearance. It’s the main ele-
ment, but we particularly need to improve efficiency, and we need better results from the survey process." General goals for the operational level include improvements in survey and inspection quality, as well as a better mine risk education program and more thorough minefield mapping. Marking and minefield management projects are also important in Bosnia, because as Mr. Rowe points out, "some of these [mine] fields aren’t going to be cleared for a very long time."

According to Mr. Gavran, "deminers

and companies do honor the [current] standards, but there are differences. Be-
fore, the entities made their own standards. Now, we want [everyone] to conform to world standards." He believes that surveyors and inspectors especially must follow identical standards, designed and enforced by the BHMAC. Officials need to know exactly what a surveyor re-
gards as a low- or high-risk area, how he determines the presence and size of a mine field, and the methodology used to reach those conclusions so they can properly prioritize demining projects and demarcate fields that won’t soon be cleared. The standardization of inspectors hardly needs explaining: offi-
cials (and civilians) need to know what an inspector means when he recommends classification of land as cleared and how he judged it so. Did he take some mine-
destroying dogs through the field, or run a machine over it? How high a hopscotch down the middle of it? Mr. Gavran feels that in the past, "every [inspector] has added or omitted something" on his/her reports, leaving uncertainty and especially in the area of long-term strategy and management of the annual work plans. Mine action requires a good roadmap, the new BHMAC can provide that. But a map doesn’t help anyone when used incor-
rectly. Planning and management are important, but nothing is accomplished if no one carries out the operation cor-
rectly.

Demining in Bosnia has not been

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be declared, ushering in a new level of information sharing between the MAC

and its donors.

Differing Roles

In the meantime, demining goes on.

Commercial Companies, non-govern-
ment organizations (NGOs), the Bosnian armies, and Civil Protection forces all execute demining activities in Bosnia.

Demining NGOs are funded by interna-
tionally funded companies and NGOs, and receive neither encouragement, law-
forcement, nor support from central or local governments. They are therefore left to operate on their own resources.

Mr. Bryant dismisses the idea that NGOs will ever completely replace the BHMAC. "It is simply not realistic to think that NGOs will ever replace BHMAC. NGOs usually have a shorter term, and many do simply not have the expertise to do a large-scale operation. They tend to focus on small projects, usually in the one to five-year range." NGOs do, however, have an important role in Bosnia, especially in clearing smaller minefields, for which there are very few donors.

The BHMAC has a number of NGOs under contract, including three ex-
pats, including Mr. Bryant) who have been hired, or are under consideration for hiring, to help implement the Demining Law. While the NGOs are important, they are not the answer to Bosnia’s mine problem. The BHMAC is not looking to replace the NGOs, but to work with them to achieve the goals of the Demining Law. The NGOs have a role in implementing the law, but the BHMAC is responsible for coordinating and overseeing the work.

NGOs

NGOs complete a large percentage of the demining tasks in Bosnia each year. They are independently funded (no Bosnian government support), relatively small organizations. Many are foreign charity groups. The BHMAC has no direct control over NGOs, save task allocation, quality control and accreditation. Still, NGOs typically try to act in the nation’s best interests, according to the BHMAC’s wishes—when their donors have the same wishes. Mr. Bryant is the Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA) program manager for Bosnian operations. NPA is a major NGO in Bosnia, maintain-
ing a staff of about 200 Bosnians (and three ex-pats, including Mr. Bryant) as they help build local capacity, teach manage-
ment skills, develop infrastructure—and do big-time demining, throughout

Significantly, they’re about to hand over demining operations in the Republic of Srpska to Civil Protection. The transition has begun.

Commercial Companies

Commercial companies often spec-
cialize in one area of demining, allowing them to complete tasks for less money than general demining organizations. An economist would say that specialized companies have a competitive advantage over other groups in their focus area. An NGO, the government or even another company often hires a commercial company to complete a specific segment of a larger job, saving the client money.

Demining companies’ concern for the bottom line leads to dynamic, innovative and cost-effective solutions to tough problems. European Lancaster Solutions (ELS) is a company that focuses on me-

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Drivers show great pride in their machines and their jobs.

The BHMAC

Drivers show great pride in their machines and their jobs.
they drive huge armored flaps back and forth over a minefield, beating the ground with rotating chains to remove all vegetation. That’s it—no clearance, no survey; just men with huge machines clearing the way for manual deminers or dogs to follow. Though area preparation removes any threat from deminer’s paths and, more importantly, triggers any tripwires straddling the minefield. In Bosnia, near-invisible tripwires filament often lead to a nasty Yugoslav mine called the PROM-1. When activated, the PROM-1’s explosive charge shoots upward about four feet before detonating, spraying shrapnel over a much wider area than conventional blast mines. Deminers really appreciate ELS services.

The ELS business model requires heavy input from Bosnian workers, depending on savvy locals to help the company improve its operations. According to Mr. Paul Simmons, ELS’ Bosnian office manager, local crews operate and maintain all of ELS equipment, learning everything there is to know about each machine. Then, when demining operations cease during the winter months, these same crews give ELS recommendations for improving their machines, often doing much of the work themselves. Mr. Simmons added that his crews included Serbs, Croats, Bosnia, Muslims, Catholics—groups who were at each other’s throats just seven years ago now hang out together at the ELS garage all winter, trading tool tips and shop talk.

Entity Armies/Civil Protection

Immediately after the war, only the Entity armies had any idea where mines might be—they laid many of them, after all. They were the first wave of demining activity in Bosnia. The armies’ work was more militarily strategic than humanitarian, and international NGOs and commercial companies soon superseded them, but their discipline, knowledge and decent equipment make them valuable assets nonetheless. As the NGOs and commercial companies slowly migrate to other demining hotspots, the Entity armies may see their demining workload increase.

The armies may pick up some of the demining work, but they have other tasks—such as defending the country. Most demining will eventually fall on Civil Protection forces, Bosnia’s indigenous, civilian-run enforcement squads. Right now, Civil Protection undertakes a relatively small proportion of the work, but in the future, when most priority minefields are cleared, Civil Protection will conduct needed spot demining and emergency calls whenever needed. In the end, Bosniaks will have only Bosnians demining their nation: the triumphant endgame of the Bosnian battle against landmines.

Conclusion

In Bosnia, there hasn’t been much difference between a realist and a cynic, since neither had anything positive to say about the future—until now. Suddenly, optimists are respectable people again. Mr. Rowe knows better than anyone the transition is frustrating and that the government team already is in place—there’s finally a real chance for stability. And the government, with all its difficult circumstances, has begun to pick up its responsibilities—that shows it’s interested in getting on with business. For the first time since independence, the Bosnian government has conceived and executed a plan—the Demining Law—that paves the way for the resolution of a Bosnian problem using a Bosnian system that will eventually rely entirely on national resources. “It’s fairly simple, actually,” Mr. Rowe explains. “We are at the point where the Bosnians can really take the lead in solving their problems, and that’s always the best way to go.”

References

Most information for this article is from its interview with Mr. David Krom, Mr. David Krom, Mr. Stephen Boyd and Mr. Paul Simmons in Sarajevo during June and July of 2003. I thank them for their cooperation and hospitality. Any errors, mistakes and omissions in this article are my fault alone.

All photos courtesy of MAC.

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Demining During Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan

The U.S. and Coalition forces’ occupation of airfields at Bagram and Kandahar in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom was initially hampered by the presence of a large number of mines and UXO in both the immediate and surrounding areas of the airfields. U.S. and Coalition forces quickly came to understand that traditional countermining demining operations were insufficient to ensure troop habitability and operational safety, such as a situation not foreseen or provided for in current U.S. Army doctrine. This experience strongly suggests that the U.S. Army should assess its current countermining doctrine and introduce a doctrinal modification to take into account the future need to deal with mines and UXO in and around base areas.

by John L. Wilkinson, Vice President, Operations, RONCO Consulting Corporation

Introduction

In many ways, Operation Enduring Freedom has diverged from the usual pattern of U.S. and Coalition military operations that developed since the Vietnam War. Whether small-scale operations such as Urgent Fury in Grenada or Just Cause in Panama, or much larger-scale operations such as Desert Shield/Desert Storm in the Gulf, a U.S. force in Afghanistan, the U.S. Army’s doctrine on dealing with mines is likely to require revision or, at least, expansion to account for situations such as those encountered in Afghanistan.

Mine Clearance vs. Demining

In U.S. Army doctrine, there is a clear delineation of responsibility between mine clearance operations, which are conducted by the Corps of Engineers, and removal and disposal of UXO, which is the responsibility of Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams attached to or integrated with combat units. Furthermore, there is a clear distinction in doctrine between mine clearance and demining; the latter, in fact, is not acknowledged as a military mission. Army doctrine calls for breaching or clearing lines of communication through minefields, clearly demarcating the cleared borders, and moving through as quickly as operationally possible. A certain number of casualties are recognized as inevitable in such operations. Military minefields are usually laid to channel or delay movement, so that direct or indirect fire, or both, can be brought to bear on an opposing force that has slowed down or is concentrated at certain predetermined points as it attempts to traverse or avoid the minefield. As a result, Army doctrine emphasizes speed in dealing with such obstacles so as to engage and defeat the enemy directly, while reducing the exposure of units to enemy fire.

At this point, it is useful to note that Army doctrine on mine clearance continues to reflect readiness for a war of rapid movement, such as was expected in Europe and was carried out in the Gulf War. On the other hand, demining or humanitarian demining, where the goal is to render defined areas mine-free or more properly mine safe, is not recognized as a military mission in doctrine. While it is true that U.S. Special Forces personnel receive training in humanitarian demining at Fort Leonard Wood, they do so in order to teach it to foreign military personnel. In combat, Special Forces do not have demining or humanitarian demining as a mission and they do not, indeed, have mine clearance as a mission either.