Humanitarian Demining Efforts in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

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In the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Introduction
In an August 2002 assessment of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reported that the following areas in the OPT are not properly fenced, marked or cleaned:

- Minefields from the 1967 Middle East war—unmarked minefields were reportedly found between Jordan and the West Bank, in the Jordan Valley and in other strategic areas in the West Bank.
- Israeli military training zones.
- Areas of confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Though no minefields have been officially declared in the Gaza Strip, Ayad Abu Qaisi, mine awareness coordinator for Defence for Children International (DCI), Palestinian Section, has no doubt the area is contaminated. ISRAEL DEFENSE FORCES (IDF) and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) have drawn criticism for their humanitarian demining (HID) efforts, or lack thereof. However, a National Mine Action Committee, composed of both Palestinian and international organizations, has taken the lead in mine awareness efforts in the OPT.

HD Efforts by IDF and PNA
In February 2003, Israel outlined its stockpiled destruction efforts, stating that 12 tons of mines were destroyed by the military in 2002. However, Abu Qaisi of DCI told Aljazeera that Israel’s efforts were not enough. Qaisi told Aljazeera, “Practically speaking, there has been no mine clearing. There is a big difference between clearing minefields for military purposes and clearing them for humanitarian purposes. In the latter case, the number of mines must be zero.”

Israel HD efforts have also been criticized. Last year, IDF declared the village of Hum in the West Bank, a mine-free zone. Aljazeera reports that, following the announcement, three people from the village died when a mine exploded.

Conversely, the PNA has made no recent official statement about banning anti-personnel mines. Palestinian groups have access to both anti-personal and anti-vehicle mines. Media reports indicate that these groups are using landmines and explosive devices, made from the explosives taken from landmines, in attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians.

March 2004:
Four soldiers were wounded when an explosive device detonated underneath an IDF tank in the northern Gaza Strip.

April 2003:
Four IDF soldiers were injured in the Gaza Strip when the armored vehicle they were traveling in struck a landmine.

March 2003:
Four IDF soldiers were killed in an improvised Palestinian Landmine destroyed their tank in the Gaza Strip.

March 2002:
Three IDF soldiers were killed when their tank ran over a mine planted by the Hamas-National Resistance on the road in the Gaza Strip.

February 2002:
Three IDF soldiers were killed and four wounded when at 88 kg mine exploded underneath their tank in the Gaza Strip.

November 2000:
Two Israeli civilians were killed and nine injured, including five children, were injured when a roadside bomb exploded near the Gaza Strip. Three of the injured children lost limbs in the attack.

HD Efforts by the National Mine Action Committee
In response to the lack of mine action in the OPT, a National Mine Action Committee was established by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNICEF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Palestinian government. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society, DCI in Palestine, and the Palestinian Ministries of Education, Youth and Sports, Interior, and Health are also members.

The committee, which was established in August 2002, coordinates mine action activities in the OPT. Activities include:

- Teaching MIRE
- Developing a national mine action plan
- Ensuring UNexo awareness messages are consistent and coherent
- Carrying our surveys to assist in the appropriate design and prioritization of activities

Abu Qaisi told Aljazeera that the emphasis on MIRE and awareness activities versus landmine removal activities is due to Israeli restrictions on removal of landmines. A Canadian initiative to demine the village of Huma near Be’erhlem was stopped short due to an Israeli ban on the import of mine-clearing, materials and restrictions on the method of clearing.

Future Danger
DICI emphasized the increased danger that comes with the possible re-deployment of the Israeli army and the hand-over of those areas to the PNA. The fear is that, with the increased mobility of Palestinians in the areas, the number of landmines/UXO accidents will increase. DCI has made it a part of its agenda to address this issue in hopes of avoiding the high number of casualties that occurred following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

References
10. Photo via AP.

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Report also mentioned that the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs fund an economic rehabilitation program in Guatemala. The microfinance program seeks to encourage sustainable farmers to start their own business.

References
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**Introduction**

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- Minefields from the 1967 Middle East war—unmarked minefields, reportedly found between Jordan and the West Bank, in the Jordan Valley and in other strategic areas in the West Bank.
- Israeli military training zones.
- Areas of confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Though no minefields had been officially declared in the Gaza Strip, Ayad Abu Qaisah, mine awareness coordinator for Defence Children International (DCI), Palestinian Section, has no doubt the area is contaminated.1 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) have drawn criticism for their humanitarian demining (HD) efforts, or lack thereof. However, a National Mine Action Committee, composed of both Palestinian and international organizations, has taken the lead in mine awareness efforts in the OPT.

**HD Efforts by IDF and PNA**

In February 2003, Israel listed unstocked destruction efforts, stating that 12 tons of mines were destroyed by the military in 2002. However, Abu Qaisah of DCI told Al Jazeera that Israel’s efforts were not enough. Qaisah told Al Jazeera, "Practically speaking, there has been no mine clearing. There is a big difference between clearing minefields for military purposes and clearing them for humanitarian purposes. In the latter case, the number of mines must be zero."2 Israeli HD efforts have also been criticized. Last year, IDF declared the village of Huwas, in the West Bank, a mine-free zone. Al Jazeera reports that, following the announcement, three people from the village died when a mine exploded.3

Conversely, the PNA has made no recent official statement about banning anti-personnel mines. Palestinian groups have access to both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. Media reports indicate that these groups are using landmines and explosive devices, made from the explosives taken from landmines, in attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians.4

**HD Efforts by the National Mine Action Committee**

In response to lack of mine action in the OPT, a National Mine Action Committee was established by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNICEF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Palestinian government.5 The Palestinian Red Crescent Society, DCI in Palestine, and the Palestinian Ministries of Education, Youth and Sports, Interior, and Health are also members.6 The committee, which was established in August 2002, coordinates mine action activities in the OPT. Activities include:

- Teaching MBE

- Developing a national mine action plan

- Ensuring UXO awareness messages are consistent and coherent

- Carrying out surveys to assess the appropriate design and prioritization of activities

Abu Qaisah told Al Jazeera that the emphasis on MBE and awareness activities versus landmine removal activities is due to Israeli restrictions on removal of landmines. A Canadian initiative to demine the village of Huwas near Nablus was stopped short due to an Israeli ban on the import of mine-clearing materials and restriction on the method of clearing.7

**March 2004:** Four soldiers were wounded when an explosive device detonated underneath an IDF tank in the northern Gaza Strip.8

**April 2003:** Four IDF soldiers were injured in the Gaza Strip when the armored vehicle they were traveling in struck a landmine.9

**February 2003:** Four IDF soldiers were killed when an improvised Palestinian landmine destroyed their tank in the Gaza Strip.10

**March 2002:** Two IDF soldiers were killed when their tank ran over a mine planted on the Kuma Nitzana road in the Gaza Strip.11

**February 2002:** Three IDF soldiers were killed and four wounded when a 98 kg mine exploded underneath their tank in the Gaza Strip.12

**November 2000:** Two Israeli civilians were killed and nine others were injured when a submunition struck a module board in the Gaza Strip. Those of the injured children lost limbs in the attack.13

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**References**


5. Abu Qaisah, Mine Awareness Coordinator, Defence Children International (DCI), Palestinian Section. Interview, Ramallah, March 6, 2003.


10. Abu Qaisah, Mine Awareness Coordinator, Defence Children International (DCI), Palestinian Section. Interview, Ramallah, March 6, 2003.

