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Rethinking Humanitarian Demining for Coalition Forces

by Maj Tom Barnett and Capt Kyle Shaffer, MN(BN), SFOR 13, 35th (M), ARNG

When you first arrive as a member of the Multinational Brigade North (MN(BN)), you are full of promise. You know your team of highly trained professional soldiers will make a difference in the lives of those who live in BiH. Then it sets in. Your six-month tour of duty doesn’t allow you time to finish what you started. So what is it you can do to make a difference in only six months? This exact question started the process of developing the National Guard Demining Initiative in BiH. There are multitudes of issues you can work to resolve in Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH). MN(BN) plays a supporting role in most of these, but we wanted to do something more. We wanted to bring a fresh idea to the area of operation (AO) that would make a significant impact on one of the most critical issues. In making our choice, we focused on two key concerns: “What will have the biggest impact on the daily lives of the people?” and “What will instill confidence in the international community to speed up economic recovery?” We chose the issue of demining.

Rethinking How We Do Demining

The Modern Peacekeeping Environment

So why choose demining? As a military officer, I have always been told to trace the bottom line up front to no matter how bad the situation. So here it is seven years after Dayton Peace Accords being in place. It’s far from what is required to create a safe and secure environment. Commitment (marking/ fencing) efforts are almost non-existent.

Impact on Civilian Populations

The mine threat in BiH is widespread, of low density and dispersed. The IED is the dividing line between the enemy armed forces at the end of hostilities as defined by the Dayton Peace Accord (GPAP). This heavily mined area is probably the single most important factor affecting our continued support of two key military tasks.

- Provide a Safe and Secure Environment
- Maintain Freedom of Movement

The first key military task assigned is our ability to “provide a safe and secure environment in BiH.” So far in 2003, mine strikes have caused 13 deaths and five serious injuries in the MN(BN) Area of Responsibility (AOR). Alone more than 2,100 sqkm of BiH requires a “Technical Survey” to determine if the area is mined. Technical evaluations have estimated that 400 sqkm to 1,800 sqkm of this suspect area will require “Clearance Operations” of some sort that include mechanical and manual clearing techniques. The key property of these operations is they must meet humanitarian demining standards. This means if we are to provide a permanent solution for a safe and secure environment.

Hold on a minute. Military teams don’t perform humanitarian demining. So why are we focusing on this issue? Mainly because we have to. In the modern world of the coalition forces, the military is not always provided with defined limits for tasks that their forces must effectively perform to meet coalition objectives. This is especially true in the world of Stabilization and Security Operations (SSAO) like the tasks we are currently performing in BiH and will soon perform in Iraq.

As we have seen in recent headlines, our military leaders are also realizing this truth. As you read this article, military leaders are working to implement these new priorities before they become roadblocks to security around the world. If we are to be successful in this transitional process, we must be active at all levels of expertise. While military leaders are focused on changing policies that address our demining limits, at the tactical level must be ready to respond with a well-developed plan of action to meet these new SASO priorities. The plan we are proposing is the first step in meeting one of these new priorities.

The IED is the dividing line between the enemy armed forces at the end of hostilities as defined by the Dayton Peace Accord (GPAP). This heavily mined area is probably the single most important factor affecting our continued support of two key military tasks. The technological advantages of a modern, well-equipped humanitarian demining team. Such military organizations working alongside the U.S. Army National Guard is uniquely suited for. The U.S. Army National Guard is ideally suited for its ability to quickly adapt to the ever-changing requirements of international security envelopes. Our contribution to the humanitarian demining operations is well-known. The U.S. Army National Guard is currently involved in the New Campaign for Peace that focuses on developing new operational doctrine and operational skills for humanitarian and civil assistance missions. These mandates combined with our operational experience in peacetime operations, will thrust the U.S. Army National Guard into the forefront of modern humanitarian demining activity.

I focused on the military norm that “When we are demining, we are thinking outside the military norms of yesterday.” The plan we are proposing is the first step in meeting one of these new priorities.

- Maintain Freedom of Movement

The second key military task affected by the BiH mine risk is our ability to maintain freedom of movement. Freedom of movement is a key ingredient in eliminating threats to economic development and to allow displaced persons and refugees to return. But today’s slow and inconsistent demining processes are unable to meet the demands of the civilian population.

Over the past few years, the average clearance rate of all demining operations in BiH is 8 sqkm per year. This rate is 1.5 times the rate needed to clear a suspected area of risk. The cost to date for all demining operations 2001–2003 was approximately $16.6 million per year. To accomplish even this minimal level of success involves the work of the Armed Forces in BiH (AF BiH) demining teams and the efforts of 40+ governmental organizations (NGO)/commercial activities that are accredited to demine by the Bosnia-Herzegovina Mine Action Center (BHMAC). These NGOs and commercial activities provide much of the support and efforts.

The plan we are proposing is the first step in meeting one of these new priorities.

- Minimize Direct Casualties

In our continued total per year, the International True Fund for Demining (ITF) stated that NGOs and commercial activities completed 2.3 km in 2002. Based on this finding, the AF BiH deminers appear to perform the bulk of the demining efforts with the limited amount of tasks awarded by the International Community.

The International Community’s Influence

Let us not forget the International Community (IC) is also watching. Based on various inputs from groups such as the International Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and other key diplomatic agencies, the IC goal for demining success in BiH was determined to be 12 sqkm per year. The IC feels this level of reduction is a key indicator of the growth of mind that the IC is one of the “confidence” barometers they use to judge the ability of BiH to create the secure and stable environment that is paramount for joining the European Union (EU). This confidence level equates to investment opportunity and faster economic recovery for BiH.2

So how do we change this?

- Minimize Direct Casualties

The question for our team now is “What do we change?” I believe the Officer in Charge (OIC) of the SFOR 12 Mine Cell, completed the initial concept for a Mine Demining Brigade (MDB) in early 2003. The original concept was to develop a Demining Brigade that could meet BiH domestic mandates as well as other international standards. DoD 1stLt Weber’s unique design integrated the strengths of a military organization with the technological advantages of a modern, well-equipped humanitarian demining team. There have been various equivalents of lesser size (i.e., Berlin Wall Teams, etc.) but none before than this brave concept. 1st Lt Weber developed a well-rounded technical design for the brigade that became the basis for the Task of Organization and Equipment (TOE) used in our current design. Based on this initial design, SFOR 13 was ready to move the concept to the next level by

Building Diplomatic and Military Support

To build this support, we need to show why this humanitarian demining effort would be successful no where else failed. So what are the failings of the initiative needed to answer? While some of the lack of success may be attributable to the nature of the mine threat, much is due to inefficiency, mismanagement and the appearance of corruption in the bureaucracy. To answer these concerns, we concentrated on four critical areas of focus.

1. An integrated demining effort is required. First was the need for a demining operation that is integrated from the state level down to the individual deminer. The current method of demining does not adequately integrate demining operations and wastes valuable time and resources. Military clearance procedures, although well integrated and fast in nature, do not provide the 99.6% clearance level mandated by international humanitarian standards in SASO environments. Our initiative must integrate mechanical methods, mechanical demining efforts, Explosive Detecting Dog Teams (EDDTs) and containment practices. Although we use these methods in tandem, they are not integrated at the level required to be consistently effective, NGO’s, commercial activities, and AF BiH demining efforts.

2. The BHMAC and government controls. The BiH Demining Law of February 2002 set standards for BH demining in its national protocols. This law is crucial leverage for the success of demining in BiH and must be fully supported by our proposal. This law allows the BiH government to enforce the BHMAC by providing two key mandates: The BHMAC is the sole national authority for the coordination of mine clearance.

In his book Progress in Humanitarian Demining: Technical and Policy Challenges, Richard Gossin has estimated it will take 1,000 years to demine the world based on today’s technology and practices. A thousand years is too long to wait for a mine-free world. We must act now to change the world we are handing to our children and their children.

Since the formation of the BHMAC and the reorganization of its
regional offices, some institutional coherence has been achieved. However, many national NGOs remain cut off from the decision cycle for prioritization and resource allocation. By providing the BHMAC with the tools and funds to facilitate double its income rate, it will help ensure that we maintain a relationship with the IFH but reduce our dependence on NGOs and commercial operators.

4. AF BIH Aspects Here's the bottom line for the AF BIH. The IHM and STP obligations to deminers, AF BIH to deminers and they are also obligated to sustain this capability. AF BIH deminers are capable manual deminers but lack consistent funding. The BH government is providing most of the administrational costs, but this support may not survive the AF BIH restructuring now underway. The reality is that since Dayton, AF BIH demining has been largely suspended by donated capital and equipment. Donations have also maintained this equipment, bought consumables, and purchased accident insurance that is required on the demining laws. While factual interests sometimes prevail, at the grass-leveled, AF BIH soldiers wish to maintain their demining momentum. A commitment to demining is not so obvious at the senior level of the AF BIH command. AF BIH commanders view demining as a drain on the already tense defense budget and the peacekeepers, by incorporating the current 470 deminers into the new force structure. If we are to be effective, we must work as a single team. We propose to the proposed 120-soldier restructuring plan and maintain a minimal AF BIH Demining Team (AF DMT) for combat engineering (mechanical/electric/terrestrial). What the AF BIH Commanders fail to understand is that the IC is using their current demining components as the only element of the AF BIH producing a positive contribution to BH unification. As the AF BIH restructures to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP), BH demining expertise is seen as the specialized contribution the AF BIH can make as a potential component of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In this sense, our demining approach has global implications.

A Proposal for the Future

Although it was a bold design, the implications of funding challenges, the changing nature of the AF BIH restructuring, and the IC's reduced commitment to BIH demining, demanded that we make changes to IHT Weber's initial design. We review the design by the MNBN Commander, the Stabilization Forces (SFOR) Commiss-and the AF BIH demining executive office in the Office of the High Representative (OHR), and the IHM and STP, we modified the initiative to meet the new sociopolitical dynamics. CPT Kyle Shackle, CIC of the SFOR Task Force (TF) 23 assigned by MTO and TF 23, solicited substantial support from the OSCE, and provided a highly capable team for the implementation of humanitarian demining in NATO stabilization operations. This demining initiative is an investment in a focused solution to the BH mine problem as well as having implications to meet global mine threats. This fact alone will make our proposal a key contributor to the U.S. Demining 2010 Initiative that aims to clear the world of mines by 2010. The key is the simplicity of the basic units and the flexibility that they provide. So what will the demining units look like? On the key objectives above, the demining initiative we are proposing is formed from two key sub-sections. These basic structures are a Humanitarian Demining Company and a Light Humanitarian Demining Company. The Humanitarian Demining Company (HDC(H)) provides a combination of light demining, EDOT, and mechanical cleaning equipment to answer the needs of countries that have just started. This company provides additional mechanical assets that are currently not part of AF BIH demining equipment. The heavy headquarters is equipped to handle this need. The HDC(H) provides more readily available components to countries that have just started. In the 26th Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs on May 2008, the BHMAC and NATO announced that the Demining Strategic Plan will continue operating the direction for the HDIN, but will also be supported with direct NATO/EU supervision. The new HDIN structure will make possible the creation of a Light Humanitarian Demining Company (HDCL) focused on manual demining, which is the only method that can aid the small-scale communities. The country's role is not a major problem, but it is a critical one for the BHMAC in developing countries. Standards. Although it focuses on manual demining operations, it may assist in preparing countries for a more modern yet efficient approach, such as the Small-leakage detection and EDOT. The key here is to retain the skills and experience of the current manual deminers in this company. The light company may also be used to perform surveying that is more performed by the regional mine action centers and commercial contractors. Based on mission requirements, these companies will be task-organized and tasked under the command of a Humanitarian Demining Battalion (HDBN) command team. The battalion headquarters is a key component as it provides the demining assets required in support of demining operations in BH. Our goal is to place these technological advanced demining systems directly in the hands of the BH demining units, allowing them to complete the remaining sludge demining tasks. This is a dynamic step for a demining unit that until now was involved in handling most mechan-ical demining activities. Ration and expenditures on commercial companies for this equipment, the demining battalion headquarters will also be responsible for maintaining them throughout BH when required. Based on how the HDIN is organized, we calculate a demining rate of 12-24 sq km per year can be achieved. The HDIN will report directly to the BH Scanning Committee on Military Matters (SCMM), which is a state-level quasi-equivalent to the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Coordinator for Mine Action. The BHMAC strategy specifies a different direction for the HDIN, but will also be supported with direct NATO/EU supervision. The new HDIN structure will make possible the creation of a Light Humanitarian Demining Company that will attract national and international donors and provide a new financial stream to the existing HDIN. Based on the initial review of costs for the unit, it will require $20-25 million to implement this plan. Based on the 2008 operational plan, the IHTF will raise $2 million annually and the BHMAC will contribute $8 million. The remaining funds will be provided by Nato/EU and other international donors. This will require that we hold BH accountable for this cost through the restructured AF BIH budget and other BH government funding. This will be a significant challenge, as we will be asking the BD government to fund operational costs that now cover the mine action needs. This will require the BD government to fund operational costs that now cover the mine action needs. This will require the BD government to fund operational costs that now cover the mine action needs. This will require the BD government to fund operational costs that now cover the mine action needs.
List of the Articles in the Protocol on Explosive Remnants of War

Preamble

Article 1: General provision and scope of application

Article 2: Definitions

Article 3: Clearance, removal or destruction of ERW

Article 4: Recording, retaining and transmission of information

Article 5: Other precautions for the protection of the civilian population, individuals and civilians from the risks and effects of ERW

Article 6: Provisions for the protection of humanitarian missions and organisations from the effects of ERW

Article 7: Assistance with respect to existing ERW Article 8: Cooperation and assistance

Article 9: Generic preventive measures

Article 10: Consultations of high contracting parties

Article 11: Compliance

Technical Annex: Contains the suggested best practice for achieving the objectives contained in Articles 4, 5 and 9 of this Protocol. High contracting parties will implement this technical annex on a voluntary basis.

Part A: Recording, storage and release of information for UXO and ERW

Part B: Warnings, MRE, marking, fencing and monitoring

Part III: Generic preventive measures

Nothing is Perfect

The Fifth Protocol is not perfect. Many believe that the language is too conditionl, and these cavers allow states to do lit- and that would allow them to etharily their obligations. Many would have liked the technical annex to be legally binding. Many of the critics are of the opinion that the technical annex of the protocol could have been stronger. However, diplomacy such as these negotiations over the last three years is the art of the possible. The coordinator of the discussions on ERW, Ambassador Chris Sanders of the Netherlands, stated in the final session of debate that in his view, the text was the best that could be achieved at the time.9 Ambassador Sanders is the only person who is fully aware of the difficulties and compromises required to get to the final text: his judgment that the protocol was the best the process could produce is probably accurate.

For proponents of a stronger protocol there was no room to continue the discussion. The alternative to not agreeing in November 2003 would have been to prolong the discussions for at least another year, if not more. There were many States and NGOs who were concerned that further negotiations would result in a further weakening of the text. The issues had, after all, been exhaustively debated and few could see what new grounds for discussion existed. Significantly, many of the states who agreed to the protocol are not part of the Ottawa Convention, including India, Pakistan, Russia, China and the United States.

Once procedures and laws are written, it will be much more difficult to persuade governments to reverse them. How states implement the treaty is where the real success of this protocol will be decided.

Endnotes

1. The full title of the convention is the “Convention on Prohibition of Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction”.

2. Would include assistance to those countries that may be affected by the possible return for their investment in mine action.

3. ohne Referat - a method for discussing text at the UN.

4. A project to develop an international inventory of UXO.

5. Article 1 of the Protocol.

References

1. ANDRO/Mine Bulletin, June 2003, 11/130/03.
2. A widely accepted by BHMAC, SCOR and industry sources.
3. Based on interviews with International Community finanial partners.

Footnotes on ICRC

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Conclusion

So where do we go from here? Although our focus is to eliminate donor funding in the future, we are working with the IC, and the BHMAC to generate donor funding for the initial equipment costs. We are confident that IC donors will support this initiative based on the multi-improved rate of return for their investment in this future EU member. Over the next few months, the team will be working with the SFOR ABFH Reconstructing Working Group to integrate this demining initiative into the future of BH. Based on guidance from the OHR, the new military structure for BH is to be implemented in January 2004. The Defence Review Commission is working diligently to resolve any legal or roadblocks for reconstructing success. If we are successful, the team sees this as the beginning of a new era for coalition military operations. BH is at a crossroads in its history where it may be the best suited and most capable country to help coalition countries make this paradigm shift.

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