A Profile of Afghanistan

Country Profile

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A Profile of Afghanistan

The Topography of a Broken Land

Afghanistan is a dry, landlocked nation marked up against snow-covered mountains that run from the northwest to the southeast and divide the northern provinces from the rest of the country. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, it also shares a tiny strip of land with China. Because of its cold winters and hot summers, nearly all of Afghanistan's supply of natural fresh water begins as snow. This limited supply, however, has been severely depleted because of a four-year drought from 1998-2002. Drought and the added strains of two million returning refugees has left nearly 80 percent of Afghanistan's population without access to safe drinking water. This drought has also affected Afghanistan's struggle for food and livestock (mostly sheep and goat) production. The country is highly dependent upon foreign aid to meet its most basic needs such as food and medical care.

Bis Ladin and Taliban and Warlords, Oh My!

Following Soviet military withdrawal in 1989, local leaders fought in bloody civil battles over control of the nation. Civil war ended with the rise of the Taliban, a group of ethnic Pashtuns backed by Pakistan. In 1994, the Taliban took Kandahar, and they entered Kabul, ending the civil war. The Taliban, whose rule was oppressive and often brutal, eventually seized power over 95 percent of the nation. The September 11th terrorist attacks in 2001 prompted the United States and Allied forces to action in support of the occupiers. Near the end of that year, major leaders from these Afghan opposition groups met in Bonn, Germany, and agreed on a plan for the formulation of a new government structure that resulted in the inauguration of Hamid Karzai as Chairman of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA). The AIA held a nationwide Loya Jirga (Grand Assembly) in June 2002, and Karzai was elected President. Despite these developments, most of the people in Afghanistan continue to live in fear of oppression and violence. With only about 20,000 peacekeepers and Karzai's inability to control any part of the country outside of Kabul, Afghanistan has come under the power of warlords who sponsor federal funds and participate in illegal opium trading and drug trafficking. Despite personal enemies. Only a fraction of the duties and taxes collected by provincial leaders find their way to the central government. UN experts expect this year's crop to yield 3,600 tons of opium; that makes up three-fourths of the world's heroin. Some of the warlords are as brutal as their predecessors. The Kabul-based Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission has observed Afghan commanders forcing forced marriages, making illegal land grants in Kabul and performing several executions.

In addition to those problems, the Taliban continues to maintain a presence in areas of the country. Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar, in hiding, is said to be controlling nearly a third of the country's territory. New offenses and more troops were deployed by the United States in the spring of 2004 in efforts to capture terrorist leader Osama Bin Laden and end Taliban control of the south. Years of conflict have left Karzai's government with the task of rebuilding demolished roads, bridges and helping a large segment of the population gain basic resources such as continuous power and running water.

The Continuing Problem of Landmines

Afghanistan's greatest man-made environmental problem is, of course, landmines. Planted by Soviet troops, the Mujahedin and the Taliban, some estimate the number of landmines in Afghanistan to be around 40 million. The types of landmines found there make up a menagerie of various devices. Deminers have encountered over 50 types of AP (blast and fragmentation) mines and the AT mines of eight different countries. More than half of these varieties were of Russian/CIS origin. The most common AP mines found are PAMN, PMN-3, POMZ, POMZ-2, Type 73 and OSV 3/2. The AT mines found are mostly Russian TM (46/57), TC-6 and Pakistani 7.62. Most of these landmines are concentrated in the western, eastern and southern regions of the country. They are scattered indiscriminately through both urban and rural areas restricting commercial and agricultural growth. They also line many of the transport roads, rendering safe and timely transportation throughout the country. Despite continuing efforts to clear landmines, unstable security and limited resources have kept them on the top of the list of the world's most mine-infested countries. According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), "Landmines have been used by all but one of Afghanistan's provinces and are scattered over an area of more than 780 km2, including towns and villages, grazing land and roads." These landmines are responsible for 1,286 deaths in the year 2002 alone.

Recent accounts of conflict has also left large amounts of UXO, which have killed another 154 people and left 1,152 injured in 2002. High-explosive ordnance devices, rockets and missiles were used in great numbers during military operations since October 2001. The additional UXO compounds the problem of landmines and fertilizers, workers working in the fields, however, Afghanistan continues to be a mountain and watch it roll ceaselessly roll down a mountain and watch it roll down and again, so have mine action workers in Afghanistan watched the size of UXO. Asadullah Khalid, Afghanistan's head of demining operations, was quoted by US Forces Intelligence as saying: "We never send deminers to areas where factional fighting or military operations are going on, and also areas that [the United Nations] thinks high risks of security instability and possible security incidents. However, those attacks happen where deminers have been safely operating for a long time, so it is hard to predict and prevent (as was the case in most terrorist attacks in the past)." It also means that local people in argue need of mine and UXO clearance may not be able to receive our clearance and mine risk education due to our suspension of operations. 1

Avoiding the Fate of Sisyphus

The United Nations' oldest mine action program is the Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA) (in operation since 1989). It, along with scores of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UN affiliated agencies, has worked diligently these past 15 years of effort, however, Afghanistan continues to be one of the most mine-ridden nations in the world. Although the Taliban have been unable to clear UN's stockpiles, and a transnational crisis in the south and east continue to use landmines as deadly traps against occupying forces. Last June, two U.S. soldiers were killed when their vehicle drove over a manually detonated mine in the city of Asadabad. Renewed conflict in the years to come continue to increase the number of UXO. As the mythic figure of Sisyphus, who was doomed to ceaselessly roll a rock to the top of a mountain and watch it roll down back again, so have mine action workers in Afghanistan watched the size of UXO.

Mine action in Afghanistan is not a new challenge task, however, because perceivable progress has been made. In the past three years especially, with the relatively greater freedom of post-Taliban rule, mine action workers have accomplished much in terms of policy, clearance, awareness and victim assistance. According to the Landmine Monitor, funding for mine action has quadrupled since 2001, totaling approximately 364 million dollars. In 2002, 2.8 million dollars of this was provided through UN MACA and about $12.9 million was via bilateral donations and in-kind contributions. Japan continues to be the leading donor of funds, giving a total of $212.2 million in 2002. The United States Commission (EC) and the United States were second and third respectively in donations.

Stockpile Destruction

Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah arrives at the Mine Ban Treaty on July 29, 2002, which officially went into force last March. After the government acceded to the treaty in September 2002, a few of the provincial authorities were willing to hand over stockpiled mines and explosive ordnance (EO). At that time, an explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) team from the Afghan Technical Consultative Agency (ATC) went into those provinces and destroyed 490 AP mines, 590 mortars, 1,000 projectiles and 200 fuses. Currently, ATC has 12 EOD teams, each consisting of 14 men, working throughout the country. In their 14 years of operation, ATC has located and destroyed a total of 3,437 AT mines, 145,932 AP mines and 1,611,676 items of UXO. The ministry of defense plans to continue a countrywide assessment to prepare an inventory list of the number, location and type of mine caches before creating a comprehensive plan for stockpile destruction.

Survey and Assessment

The mine action program has been problematic in recent years due to an explosion of economic growth in urban areas. This has caused an increase in the need for

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clearance activities in reconstruction projects. According to Takko Kubo, Surveyors must be trained to have the skills needed to identify the needs of development. Prioritization of mine action activities has made a perceivable shift towards a more effective approach, due to post-conflict security issues in 2002 and 2003. The Mine Clearance Planning Agency on working with inter-agency and international non-governmental organizations was set up by the Survey Action Center (SAC), started a new 14-month survey in June 2003. The following are some tentative survey and destroyed devices figures for 2003.

Clearance

According to the Landmine Monitor, about 263 sq km of mined land has been cleared in addition to 322 sq km of battlefields from 1989–2002. In that time, over 268,000 AP mines, nearly 13,000 AT mines, and 1,000 APC mines were detected and destroyed. Below are tentative figures for the year 2003.

Through February 2001, ATC had cleared 824 sq km of high-priority mined areas and 192.7 sq km of former battlefields. It is currently working to clear battle and minedfield areas in and around the Kabul International Airport, the Kabul-Jalalabad Highway and nearby secondary roads that could serve as alternate routes to the highway.

ATC is also working on a few clearance side projects on provincial roads (funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development) and at the Shekud Dam in Ghazni province. The organization currently has 25 manual minedfield and battle area clearance teams of 40 men each, assisted by a few dozenós heavy equipment operators, and 10 mechanical clearance units using excavators, backhoe loaders in rotary cutters. At the same time, the organization is implementing a Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) Program in the northern Kunduz province, ATC has succeeded in facilitating the absorption of 110 ex-combatants into a clearance, mine risk education (MRE) and permanent marking program. Last February, ATC started a new DDR program in the northeastern Kapisa province (north of Kabul).

The main agencies working on clearance, in addition to ATC, are the Agency for Rehabilitation & Energie Conservation (ARCEC), the Danish Demining Group (DDG), the Demining Agency for Afghanistan (DAFA), the HALO Trust, the Mine Detection and Dog Center (MDC), OMAZ, MPDA, the Monitoring, Evaluation and Training Agency (METHA) and RONCO Consulting Corporations in Kabul. RONCO is one of the most experienced NGOs working in various regions. DAFAs clears minedfields and mined areas mainly in the northern and central regions of the country. The HALO Trust began demining in Afghanistan in 1989 and clears multiple types of mines, mainly in the central and northern regions. The MDC has been training mine detection dogs (MDDs) and handling since 1989. OMAZ conducts both mine awareness and clearance training for the MDDs. The MDDs identify and clear various types of mines, including the battle areas of Afghanistan's desert. As the poet Durdui tells it, it is not a dream that seems to fade away, but mine actions are inevitable. It is not the complete evacuation of Afghanistan's desert that draws him, but the enemies he claims with them. The sense of hope in Durdui describes in his poem remains in the hearts of Afghanistan's soldiers who fight for the same reason.

Pakistan recently announced the planned start of the Torkham-Jalalabad high-way construction project in May 2004. With an estimated cost of $20 million, the road is due to be completed by June 2005. With surveys already underway, deminers are currently working to clear the area for construction.

Conclusion

Afghanistan has a long history as one of the world's greatest centers of culture and art. It produced such cultural icons as famed Central Asian poet Rahim Baha and the ancient reli-
gion of Zoroastrianism. Once the seat of the famed Tigris-Euphrates civilization, Afghanistan is rich in cultural artifacts and extensive mining and excavation has destroyed much of the ancient culture and relics. The beauty and depth of Afghanistan and their land persist despite the ravages of war, famine and economic instability. Their ability to endure is a trait that seems to have passed on to the mine actions fighters from around the world who have been vigilantly working for over a decade to clear the land of mines. As the poet Durdui tells it, it is not a dream that seems to fade away, but mine actions are inevitable. It is not the complete evacuation of Afghanistan's desert that draws him, but the enemies he claims with them. The sense of hope in Durdui describes in his poem remains in the hearts of Afghanistan's soldiers who fight for the same reason.
cleavage activities in reconciliation projects.

According to Takanu Kabo, Surveyors must now embark on a process of reconciliation with the needs of development. Prioritization of mine action activities has made a perceptible shift in recent years, and the development of a mine action strategy has been delayed due to post-conflict security issues in 2002 and 2003. The Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCAP) is working with north and western regions of the country with the support of the Survey Action Center (SAC), estab-
lishing a new 14-month survey in June 2003. The following are some tentative survey and destroyed devices figures for the year.

Clearance

According to the Landmine Monitor, about 263 sq km of mined land has been cleared in addition to 422 sq km of barren field areas from 1989-2002. In that time, over 208,000 AP mines, nearly 13,000 AT mines, and 1,400 cluster bomblets have been removed and destroyed. Below are tentative figures for the year.

Through February 2003, ATC had cleared 82.4 sq km of high-priority mined areas and 192.7 sq km of former battlefields. It is currently working to clear battle and minedfield areas in and around the Kabul International Airport, the Kabul-Jalalabad Highway and nearby secondary roads that could serve as alternate routes to the highway.

ATC is also working on a few clearance side projects on provincial roads (funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development) and at the Stilwel Dian in Ghazni province. The organization currently has 25 manual minefield and barren area clearance teams of 40 men each, 64 mine detectors (40 men), a mine detector-support staff, and 10 mechanical clearance units using excavators, backhoe loaders, and mine carriers. A team is also implementing a Demobilization, Disarmament and Reinte-
gration (DDR) Program in Afghanistan.

Mine Risk Education (MRE) and Victim Assistance

MRE in Afghanistan has three focus areas: returning refugees, children, and aid workers and journalists. The programs utilize such approaches as MRE briefings at schools, informal education for women and girls, sessions held in mosques, community centers or hospitals, and mass media campaigns.

The Landmine Monitor states that at least 12 NGOs have been providing MRE to civilians and refugees in high-risk areas. These organiza-
tions are AMAR, AREA, HALO Trust, the Association for Aid and Relief (Japan), AMRIT, Relief Institute (ARI), Save the Children—USA, the Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCH), Handicap International (HI), Afghan Mine Action (AFMA), A-partners, and the Afghan Mine Action Education Project, DAVOSA, MEA, and the Afghan Campaign to Ban Landmines (ACBL).

Conclusion

Afghanistan has a long history as one of the world's greatest centers of culture and art. It produced such cultural icons as famed Central Asian poet Rahman Bahaui and the ancient religion of Zoroastrianism. Once the seat of the rich and powerful Achaemenid Empire, Afghanistan is one of the richest archaeological artifacts in the world (most of which are now either lost or damaged). Afghanistan's richly endowed ancient culture, however, remains intact and complete. Afghanistan's mines have destroyed most of its tangible artifacts and relics.

The beauty and depth of Afghanistan and their land persisted despite the ravages of war, famine and economic instability. Their ability to endure is a trait that seems to have passed on to the mine action workers from around the world who have been vigilantly working for over a decade to clear the land of mines. As the poet Durrani elicits, it is not the barrenness of Afghanistan's deserts that draws him, but the onions he claims with them. The sense of home that Durrani describes in his poem remains in the hearts of Afghan mine action workers as they continue working at what we perceive to be mere deserts. For this reason, millions of Afghan refugees have returned and continue to return to their still dangerous homeland. Their determination to reclaim this broken land motivates the world to strive with them.

References


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International Conference on Afghanistan

The thinking behind the following three observed evolutions converges towards a similar way to move forward with the implementation of a paradigm shift in research, development, deployment and operational standards from humanitarian demining towards restoring local communities and evidence-based risk management.

1. At the operational level in EC-FFP, R&D on humanitarian demining is part of "Improvement of Risk Management." The text of the "Call for Proposals" is technically oriented towards (open) system developments and should be interpreted as a transposition of the global objective to achieve high-level society benefits.

2. At the level of field actions, in practice, mine action centres (MACs) are adapting their priorities to those of the local. Avoiding famine by food supply, medical assistance and agricultural activities or restoration of water sources might come first before the removal of mines. S. Grainger presented a case study in Lebanon in which urban reseach of the interaction between the contracted demining organisation had the opportunity of fully removing the mines that were hidden in certain situations. In certain situations, the risk of famine or socio-economic failure might either subjectively perceived or objectively existed, together with the priority of action. Ranking of risks is implicitly made.

3. At the level of designing model and R&D. J. Trevelyan presented a possible model of agricultural exploitation in the context of "Improvement of Mine action Risk." The model is an initial proposal and includes mine-minant agricultural machinery development and new agricultural practice. The idea is certainly not mature yet but deserves to be taken up further.

The fundamental question was raised of whether or not this viewpoints is worth of being considered as a proposal. In our opinion, it is "the felling of minefields that have little impact on the socio-economic life rather than their removal" and "prioritizing a solution to the threat of famine by culti-
vations rather than to clear it" can be seen as interim solutions to solve urgent local problems causing immediate and high risk, taken up before the actual mine clearance.

The emerging new paradigm also triggered a lot of organised questions. New views are required on the quality of results and liability defined in terms of achieving acceptable risks, which should be adopted by the donors in their contracts. Probably due to the presence of representatives from several demining companies, the difficulty of the statement of work in the contracts was raised at several occasions, e.g., the specification of the number of mines to be cleared and the total number of fragments remaining in the terrain. The UN requirement for humanitarian mine clearance efficiency of 99.9 percent is in contradiction to the term "acceptable risk," which primarily depends on the end use of the cleared land.

Conclusions and Discussion

The EUDMEM-SCOOT conference has brought together subgroups of all players in the field of humanitarian demining. The presentations and discussions were characterised by an increasing maturity, transparency and honesty about the achievements. The presentations and discussions were characterised by an increasing maturity, transparency and honesty about the achievements. The authors wish to thank all the EUDMEM-SCOOT conference participants, and mainly the ones that have contributed to extracting the general trends, conclusions and open questions described in this paper. Some were obvious to pick up, others were slightly hidden and needed collaborative digging to be extracted. Special thanks go to Karin De Bruyn, Claudio Buschini, Russell Gasser, Stewart Grainger, Vernon Jemyn, Paddy Slagden, Tim Tinu, Susanne Spalding, Chris Wickert, Noel Milliner, Helmut Krannmer, Russell Harmon and Francois Limmans.