

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 15
Issue 2 *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*

Article 17

July 2011

Security Threats to Afghan Deminers

CISR JOURNAL

Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal>



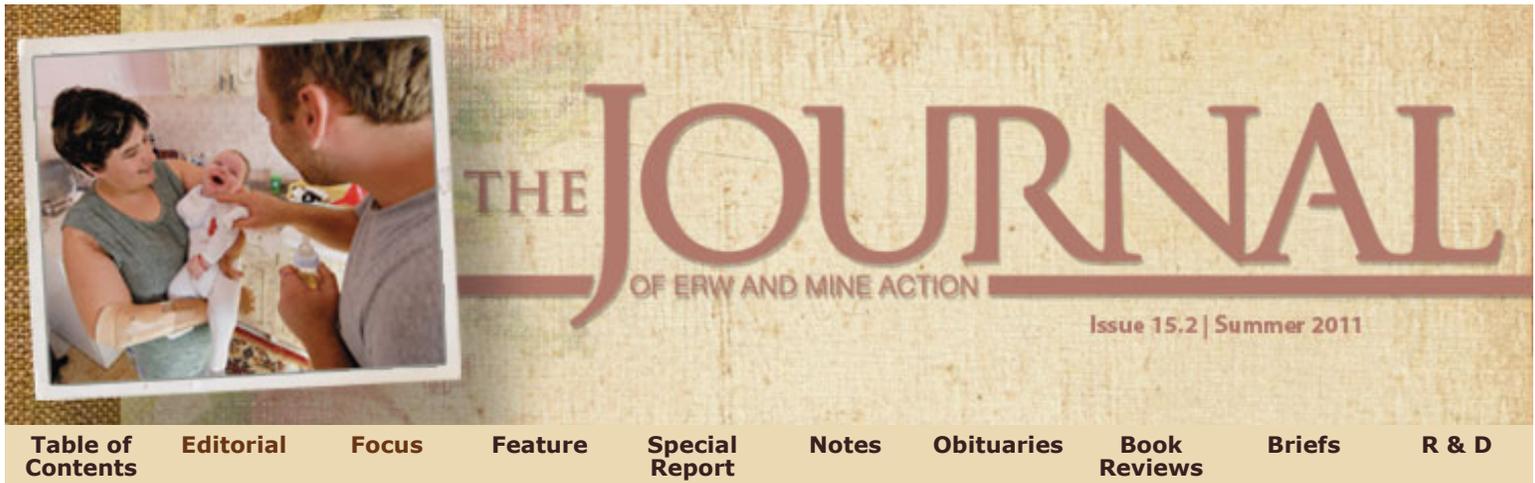
Part of the [Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons](#), and the [Peace and Conflict Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

JOURNAL, CISR (2011) "Security Threats to Afghan Deminers," *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action* : Vol. 15 : Iss. 2 , Article 17.

Available at: <https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol15/iss2/17>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.



Security Threats to Afghan Deminers

Abductions of deminers in Afghanistan have placed the safety and lives of those working to clear mines at risk. At the end of 2010, two separate incidents drew attention in the landmine community to this alarming safety concern for which the Taliban and other organized criminals are responsible. The Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan and other mine-action organizations have been working to protect the deminers' safety, which sometimes means restricting mined areas; however, this has not hindered dedicated deminers from continuing their demining efforts in Afghanistan.



A landmine. Afghanistan is covered with metal scraps and live munitions from past conflicts.

Photo courtesy of U.N./Luke Powell.

As a result of the Soviet invasion (1978–1992), Afghanistan is littered with landmines and other explosive remnants of war. In addition, since the current conflict began in 2003, insurgents continue to battle Coalition Forces using roadside bombs and other improvised explosive devices. Consequently, Afghanistan, one of the most mine-laden and IED-affected countries in the world,¹ has a dire need for deminers in the area. As of 2009, two-thirds of Afghanistan's mines were cleared, but demining organizations face a challenge in removing the remaining mines while minimizing the risk to deminers.¹ Since the start of the U.S.-led mission in Afghanistan, there has been increased insurgent activity that continues to heighten security threats and dozens of Afghans and foreigners have been abducted.² The occurrence of two separate deminer abductions in December 2010 highlights this disturbing trend.

Deminers at Risk

According to the Afghanistan NGO [nongovernmental organization] Safety Office, 10 deminers were killed, 23 injured and 12 abducted in 2010.³ The Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan, which states there are more than 30 mine-action organizations with greater than 14,000 personnel currently working in Afghanistan, reported significantly higher statistics for this time period: 17 deminers killed, 35 injured and 73 abducted. Regardless of the exact numbers, terrorists and insurgent groups are a threat to deminers in Afghanistan, especially along the southern border with Pakistan.³

The two separate abductions in December serve as a reminder that this threat continues in Afghanistan. In the first abduction, unknown gunmen captured 16 deminers working for the Organisation for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation in the Momand Dara district on 1 December 2010, and nine of them escaped while abductors fought security forces on the Pakistan border that same day.^{1,4} Two days later the remaining seven were released.⁵ Ali Shah Paktiawal, Nangarhar Provincial Police Chief, stated, "The elders got involved in the Momand Dara district where they were kidnapped, and then the kidnappers released them. They are in good health."⁵ Shortly after this incident, on 9

December 2010, abductors hijacked a vehicle and captured 18 Afghan deminers working for the Mine Detection Center.⁶ According to Provincial Police Chief General Abdul Hakim Isaqzai, "The abductions took place on Thursday afternoon on a road in the Musa Khel district. Assailants riding on motorcycles attacked the deminers, who were traveling by bus, and took them hostage [sic] on board the vehicle."⁶ The next day, Afghan and foreign troops freed the deminers.⁷

Pushing Onward Through Violence

Although the occurrence of two separate deminer abductions in the course of one month is particularly alarming to the mine-action community, these attacks are indicative of a persistent problem in Afghanistan in recent years. On 13 July 2006, 20 gunmen attacked 60 deminers in Kandahar. The deminers were held overnight while their compound was robbed. Following this and similar attacks, the United Nations stated, "Despite these repeated attacks against deminers, the Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan does not intend to stop its activities in any part of the country; the Programme never ceased its activities even during the wars period."⁸ From 2007 to 2008, more clearance teams in Afghanistan helped deminers clear 87 percent more land than the previous year; however, attacks on deminers continued.

"According to the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office, 10 deminers were killed, 23 injured and 12 abducted in 2010."



Demining engineer of the Mine Action Programme of Afghanistan clears one of the anti-personnel landmines.
Photo courtesy of U.N./UNMACA.

The Mine Detection Center lost seven deminers in March 2008 in the Kandahar province. In addition, two MDC deminers were killed in the Kunduz province. Another five deminers from Afghan Technical Consultants were killed in the Jawzjan province.¹ In response to the attacks and other threats, which often occurred while clearance teams were traveling between sites, commercial companies ceased transportation by roads and began using more expensive transportation by air.¹ After an abduction of 16 U.N. deminers on 30 June 2009 between the provinces of Paktia and Khost, Police Chief Azizullah Wardak criticized the deminers for not obtaining permission from local security forces prior to entering the area, considering that two similar incidents had previously occurred in Paktia.⁹ In 2009, overall attacks on deminers were down one-third from the Mine Action Coordination Centre of Afghanistan's 2008 figure of 48 accidents.¹ One deminer was killed and 31 injured in 2009. Nonetheless, since 1988, MACCA has cleared more than 15,000 hazardous areas in Afghanistan.¹⁰

Hopeful Outlook

In a press release prior to the recent attacks in December 2010 and following an 11 April 2010 attack that killed five deminers and injured 16, Dr. Haider Reza, Programme Director for MACCA, said, "We strongly condemn the use of all anti-personnel mines and other improvised explosive devices, which have led to such a high number of civilian deaths in this country already, and will [continue to kill people] for many years to come if humanitarian deminers are prevented from carrying out this life-saving work."¹⁰ He continued, "I call on all my fellow Afghans to support this important humanitarian work to protect Afghan men, women and children from the threat of landmines and other explosive remnants of war."

Despite the very real threats to their safety, deminers in Afghanistan continue to remove landmines and ERW in an effort to make the country safe for its residents. ↴

~Meghan Wallace, CISR Staff

The Journal of ERW and Mine Action

Center for International Stabilization and Recovery
James Madison University
Tel: +1 540 568 2503
E-mail: [cisr\(at\)jmu.edu](mailto:cisr(at)jmu.edu)

Endnotes

1. "Afghanistan." *Landmine Monitor Report 2008–2010*. http://www.the-monitor.org/lm/2009/res/Landmines_Report_2009.pdf. Accessed 22 March 2011.
2. "Gunmen Kidnap Deminers in Afghanistan." *AFP*. 1 December 2010. <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jit5EyvGS-csrgGu0SLV6DQdDB4A?docID=CNG.482371cb5277505f84bdeb4327d94ea6.a91>. Accessed 21 January 2011.
3. "UN official issues ringing denunciation of Taliban terrorism in Afghanistan." *UN News Centre*. 18 June 2007. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=22938&Cr=afghan&Cr1=>. Accessed 21 January 2011.
4. "Kidnapped Afghan demining team members released." *AlertNet*. 4 December 2010. <http://bit.ly/fOBvIQ>. Accessed 24 January 2011.
5. "Police: Hostages released near Afghanistan-Pakistan border." *CNN*. 4 December 2010. http://articles.cnn.com/2010-12-04/world/afghanistan.kidnapping_1_border-hostages-province?_s=PM:WORLD. Accessed 24 January 2011.
6. "Deminers Abducted in East Afghanistan." *PressTV*. 9 December 2010. <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/154709.html>. Accessed 25 January 2011.
7. "Abductors Deminers by Afghan, Foreign Troops." *Reuters*. 10 December 2010. <http://in.reuters.com/article/2010/12/10/idINIndia-53475820101210>. Accessed 25 January 2011.
8. "UN Official Issues Ringing Denunciation of Taliban Terrorism in Afghanistan." *UN News Centre*. 7 June 2007. <http://newsblaze.com/story/20070618155023tsop.nb/topstory.html>. Accessed 28 February 2011.
9. "16 U.N Deminers Killed in Afghanistan." *MSNBC*. 5 July 2009. http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31743634/ns/world_news-south_and_central_asia/t/un-deminers-kidnapped-afghanistan/. Accessed 1 June 2011.
10. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=34333&Cr=afghan&Cr1>. 12 April 2010. <http://bit.ly/mc56X>. Accessed 1 June 2011.

[TOP OF PAGE](#)



The Journal of ERW & Mine Action is sponsored by:



© 2011 All rights reserved. *The Journal of ERW and Mine Action*, Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at James Madison University, MSC 4902 Harrisonburg, VA / USA 22807 | Email: cisr@jmu.edu

If cited properly, short sections (a sentence or two) can be used without permission. Written *Journal of ERW and Mine Action* approval is required, however, before longer sections of content published in *The Journal* may be used by another source or publication. ISSN 2154-1485_

[Past Issues](#) * [CISR Home](#) * [Subscribe](#)