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Afghan Deminers Kidnapped and Killed

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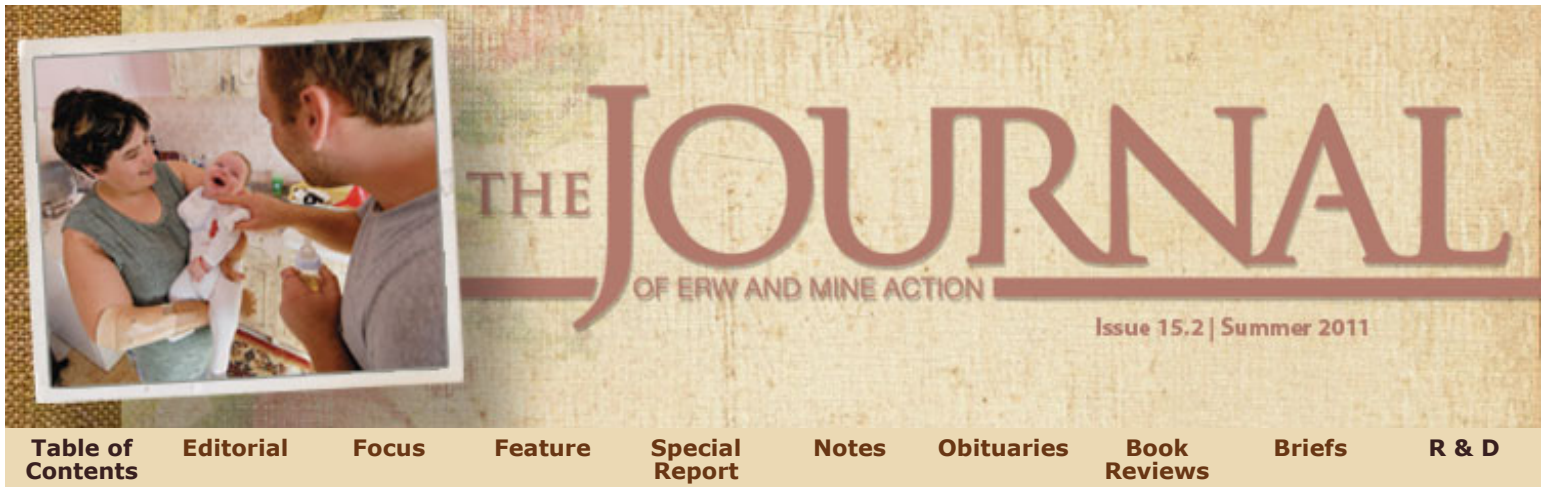
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Afghan Deminers Kidnapped and Killed

An investigation into the brutal killing of at least four Afghan deminers captured in Western Farah in early July 2011 is ongoing. Details about the incident and the suspected perpetrators are not yet confirmed.¹ On 6 July 2011, a group of 31 people belonging to the Demining Agency for Afghanistan had been ambushed and kidnapped.² The DAFA members were taken hostage in the Balabuluk district, known for being particularly dangerous and the focus of the Taliban insurgency in Western Farah province.³ Those captured were stated to have been involved in life-saving activities.⁴ Although the spokesperson for the Afghan Interior Ministry stated the DAFA members were abducted "by the Taliban or other militants," Taliban spokesman Qari Yousuf Ahmadi has denied his group's involvement.^{3,5} Alan Macdonald, the head of Mine Action Coordination Centre for Afghanistan stated he was "appalled" at the killings and has asked Afghans to "support and respect the efforts being made by their fellow countrymen to clear Afghanistan of landmines and other explosives weapons of war."⁴

It has been reported that on 10 July 2011, 27 of the 31 captives were released after tribal elders and government officials facilitated negotiations between DAFA and the kidnappers.² Prior to their release, the deminers were warned by captors not to work with foreign or domestic organizations.⁶ Abdul Satar, the head of DAFA, reported that he did not know if the deminers would be willing to return to work.⁵ The nongovernmental organization is a local charity funded by grants and donations, located in southern Kandahar.³

Kidnappings are hardly uncommon in Afghanistan, both criminal and insurgent groups have benefited from the lucrative business and have been known to capture Afghans and foreigners ever since the U.S. invaded and attempted to expel the Taliban from the country.³ In fact, 18 Afghan deminers from the Mine Detection Centre based in Kabul were captured in Khost province by unidentified gunmen in December 2010 and later released unharmed.⁷ One week beforehand, 16 members of the Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation were captured and released near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.⁸ MACCA reports 40 deminers have been killed since April 2010 under various circumstances.⁴ ↴

~Blake Williamson, CISR staff

Center for International Stabilization and Recovery
James Madison University
800 S. Main St. MSC 4902
Harrisonburg, VA 22807
cisr(at)jmu.edu
<http://cisr.jmu.edu>

Endnotes

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