April 2008

Iraq Facing the Legacy of Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War

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In this article, the description reflects the current historical and state of mine-action efforts in Iraq. He argues for a renewed focus on these issues and for a comprehensive approach, linking other humanitarian efforts with mine action.

by Salomon Schreuder [United Nations Development Programme]

Iraq Facing the Legacy of Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War

In August 2005, the Mine Action Team of the U.S. Department of State’s Office of Project Services as part of the Rapid Response Plan. This survey was very successful, as the security situation was constantly changing. The Iraq Landmine Impact Survey was launched in 2004, executed by the Vietnam Veterans of America Security Foundation’s Information Management and Mine Action Programs and funded by the U.S. Department of State. The U.S. Development Programme funded the IMMAP team leader for the ILIS with financial support from the European Commission. The ILIS covered 15 governorates but had to be halted in May 2005 due to the deteriorating security situation in the remaining five governorates. Meanwhile, several large-scale reconstructions projects were halted due to the contamination in southern Iraq—the most prominent being a $400-million rehabilitation project by the Ministry of Electricity and the Rumaila Oilfield project by the Ministry of Oil, both in the Ba’raa governorate.

As of March 2006, the ILIS revealed 1,622 impacted communities out of more than 12,000 visited, with 3,673 suspected hazardous areas. A total of 1,720 square kilometres (663 square miles) of contaminated land was recorded, out of which 318 square kilometres (20 square miles) of contaminated land is in Ba’raa governorate alone. These figures only cover approximately 79 percent of the total area of the country. In the southern part of the country, where the most intensive battles took place, as much as 90 percent of the contaminated land is agricultural land, directly impacting the livelihood of most people in these rural areas. The Iraq Landmine Impact Survey Report, covering 13 of the 18 Iraqi governorates, was completed and has been released recently.

According to the ILIS, 577 recent victims (within the 24 months before the survey) have been recorded. This figure does not reflect a complete picture as there is no effective victim-monitoring and recording structure on the ground, while the ILIS records victims solely from impacted communities. Currently, the UNICEF, the World Health Organization and the UNMAS are at the pre-final preparatory stage to launch a pilot U.N. joint project on victim monitoring in the governorates of Baghdad, Ba’raa and Erbil. There is a particular focus on capacity development of, among other things, emergency room and civil defense offices to improve a chain of data management and effective utilisation of the data. Once this project is proven successful, this pilot project is something the United Nations plans to expand to a full-sized programme across the country.

Magnetic Induction and ERW Contamination

After Operation Iraqi Freedom and post-conflict reconstruction, an emergency survey was conducted in the north by MAG and in the south by MineWeb International, contracted by the United Nations Office of Project Services as part of the Rapid Response Plan. This survey was very successful, as the security situation was constantly changing. The Iraq Landmine Impact Survey was launched in 2004, executed by the Vietnam Veterans of America Security Foundation’s Information Management and Mine Action Programs and funded by the U.S. Department of State. The U.S. Development Programme funded the IMMAP team leader for the ILIS with financial support from the European Commission. The ILIS covered 15 governorates but had to be halted in May 2005 due to the deteriorating security situation in the remaining five governorates. Meanwhile, several large-scale reconstructions projects were halted due to the contamination in southern Iraq—the most prominent being a $400-million rehabilitation project by the Ministry of Electricity and the Rumaila Oilfield project by the Ministry of Oil, both in the Ba’raa governorate.

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action operators, although there are some areas where mine-action activities can be executed effectively, such as in the Kurdish region and deep rural areas of Buza governorate, known as one of the most dangerous governorates in Iraq. It is hoped the security situation will improve to expand mine-action activities to the rest of the country.

The Way Forward

UN agencies have been taking extra care in planning activities in recent years due to limited funding; however, it is slowly becoming a trend to link mine action with other development projects to maximise the effectiveness of available funding. For instance, MRE activities have been linked with area-based interventions and other activities under child protection, while mine clearance is linked with agricultural development in southern Iraq. The country still requires mine-action support from the international community—support that will put a premium on national ownership, sustainability, and integrating mine action into other humanitarian and development activities. This emphasis means that technical advisory support needs to be complemented with management capacity-building and new strategies. This must be provided in tandem with the obligations of the Ottawa Convention. It is an encouraging indication that on 15 August 2007, Iraq acceded to the Ottawa Convention, becoming a signatory to this Convention.

Off-the-shelf Solutions Save Lives in Iraq

Military personnel in Iraq are using an ever-increasing list of unconventional civilian materials to provide new solutions to common problems. Insurgents in the country are burying improvised explosive devices along roadways frequented by U.S. military personnel, concealing the weapons under dirt and other debris. The U.S. Army’s Rapid Equipping Force responded by strapping commercially made leaf blowers to a clearance operation in a cost-effective and timely fashion, utilising an innovative methodology and clearance procedures developed over years of experience. This has been included in the Ottawa Convention as an enabling action for livelihoods, health care and schools, reconstruction and development because mine action is an enabling action for livelihoods, health care and schools, reconstruction and development because mine action is an enabling action for livelihoods.

In Iraq, the destructive and inhumane legacy of mines and ERW deserves stronger advocacy and action. Amidst a surge of foreign aid for mine clearance in the late 1990s, the Ottawa Convention was seen as a critical stage in strengthening relations in the Middle East because Jordan will be an example to other countries in the region facing similar problems. In April 2002, His Majesty King Abdullah issued a royal decree establishing the Government Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation.

In January 2006, NPA deployed a start-up team to establish the programme in Jordan. NPA employs 165 people working directly for establishing and managing the National Mine Action Programme in Jordan. NPA employs 165 people working directly for establishing and managing the National Mine Action Programme in Jordan. NPA employs 165 people working directly for establishing and managing the National Mine Action Programme in Jordan.

In September 2005, NPA was asked to assist the NCDB in clearing the Wadi Araba region. NPA deployed an assessment mission to Jordan in November 2005. The mission concluded that NPA could contribute to a clearance operation in a cost-effective and timely fashion, utilising both innovative methodology and clearance procedures developed over years of experience. The assessment mission confirmed the commitment of the NCDB to combat the mine problem in the country and to support and facilitate NPA in the establishment of a mine-action programme in Jordan.

Salomon Schreuder is the UNDP Senior Mine Action Advisor, focusing on providing institutional development support to the Iraq National Mine Action Authority. He studied production engineering and is a veteran in military engineering with 35 years of experience, holding a Joint Staff College qualification. He has been involved in mine action in Iraq for the past seven years.

by Esma Al-Samarai and Stephen Bryant [Norwegian People’s Aid]

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is the only mine-affected country among its neighbours to ratify the Ottawa Convention, which went into effect 1 May 1999. Landmines lie along the borders with Israel, in Wadi Araba, and in Syria, in the northern region, and there is landmine/unexploded ordnance contamination in the Jordan Valley. Jordan has taken ownership of the problem. Complying with the Convention is seen as a critical stage in strengthening relations in the Middle East because Jordan will be an example to other countries in the region facing similar problems. In April 2002, His Majesty King Abdullah issued a royal decree establishing the Government Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation.

The NCDB is the primary national mine-action authority responsible for establishing and managing the National Mine Action Programme, ensuring that it is anchored in the overall development goals and strategies of the country. Furthermore, the NCDB makes sure all aspects of mine action are integrated—including mine clearance, mine-risk education, and survivor and victim assistance—as well as coordinates and leads resource mobilisation. Mine-risk education and mine-victim assistance are conducted by many national and international organisations in collaboration with the NCDB.

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Demining is conducted by the Royal Engineers Corps and Norwegian People’s Aid. Localised impact on communities is considered moderate to severe by international standards. The minefield in Jordan has been cleared to date, allowing agriculture and industry to return to areas currently inaccessible due to the threat of landmines.

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