

Pakistan

by Kateland Shane [Mine Action Information Center]

In addition to suffering from continual suicide bombings and other violent terrorist acts, residents of Pakistan must face the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance. The country has had problems with mines, UXO and terrorism since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Pakistan also has been involved in several disputes with India since 1947.

A History of Violence

In 2002, an attack on the Indian parliament led the forces of both India and Pakistan to lay mines along the Line of Control, the *de facto* border in the Kashmir territory.¹ The two countries have disputed the territory since 1947. Pakistan and India have since signed a ceasefire, but some reports estimate that nearly 200,000 mines were laid during the standoff. Although the Pakistani military claims to have cleared 80 percent of the land, mines continue to affect the region. In June 2007, forest fires and rising temperatures triggered the explosion of over 200 mines along the Line of Control, injuring livestock and causing other damage to nearby villages.² Residents in Kashmir also claim that there are some mined areas along the LoC that have not been properly marked or fenced.³

Mines were used against Pakistan during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Federally Administered Tribal Areas along the border with Afghanistan remain the most affected by the remains of these mines, many of which were dropped by helicopter or laid defensively by Soviet and Afghan forces.⁴

In addition to these conflicts, Pakistan also is plagued by internal violence. Militants, terrorist organizations and other armed groups have employed mines and explosives, resulting in civilian casualties. Insurgents have used mines defensively around their own camps and offensively along roads and in the mountains and plains of Pakistan.³ In March 2006, 28 people in a wedding party were killed by an anti-tank mine while crossing a stream in the Balochistan province. Authorities claim the mine was laid by tribal insurgents.⁵ Suicide bombings are also prevalent in Pakistan. In July 2007, suicide bombers killed over 50 people in Pakistan during a string of attacks.⁶

Pakistan is one of the few countries still manufacturing anti-personnel mines. Although Pakistan has not exported landmines since 1992, the country has been a major exporter in the past. According to estimates from the *Landmine Monitor*, Pakistan

has stockpiled at least six million AP mines—the fifth largest stockpile in the world.³ While Pakistan has shown support for the international ban on AP mines, the country has not yet acceded to the Ottawa Convention.⁷ Pakistan has ratified Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Weapons⁸ and is an active participant in CCW meetings.³

Renewed Threat

In December 2006, the Pakistani government announced possible plans to mine the border with Afghanistan. Pakistani officials argued that the move would secure the border with Afghanistan and keep the Taliban from moving in and out of Afghanistan.⁹ After much speculation and international criticism, Pakistani Foreign Minister Khursheed Kasuri announced at a press conference in Germany that the government had decided against using landmines.¹⁰ Pakistan will instead rely on building fences and monitoring its border.¹⁰

Survey, Marking and Clearance

At present, there is no central mine-action authority or center in Pakistan. All mine/UXO clearance and marking activities are conducted by the military.³ In May 2005, Response International conducted a mine-impact survey in Pakistan. The results of the survey showed that there are about 1,200 mine/UXO victims living in Pakistan and a mine/UXO accident rate of up to 15 per month.¹¹ Response International conducted another survey in Pakistan in early 2006, examining 7,189 households. They also began a two-year survey in December 2005. The organization is currently working on compiling a database of mine/UXO survivor information in Pakistan.³

Mine-risk Education

Nongovernmental organizations have been heavily involved in mine-risk education in Pakistan, including the Pakistan Campaign to Ban Landmines, the Community Motivation and Development Organization, Response International UK, Islamic Relief and Mines Advisory Group.³ MAG works closely with Islamic Relief to provide MRE to residents in the Kashmir district along the contaminated Line of Control. Following a 2005 assessment, MAG trained 20 workers from Islamic Relief in a four-week workshop to provide MRE in Kashmir as part of a larger MRE project.¹² The joint MAG/IR education project is expected to reach 70,000 people.³

Looking Ahead

The recent conflicts surrounding or involving Pakistan have left a large threat of mines and explosive remnants of war for both Pakistan and its neighbors. The continuing instability in the region and Pakistan's lack of governmental support has allowed the situation there to compound itself. The use of mines in multiple conflicts and a lack of mine-action efforts between conflicts have left multiple generations of mines and ERW. In addition, internal struggles and continued acceptance of the use of landmines has made current mine-action efforts difficult.

The present mine and UXO situation ensures continued casualties in Pakistan, particularly in the areas closest to the LoC, such as the Abbaspur and Hajira Tehsils in Poonch district.¹¹ The Federally Administered Tribal Area along the border with Afghanistan remains contaminated as well, as evidenced by the 2,300 or more estimated mine victims currently living in the Kurram Agency.¹³ In Balochistan province, mine incidents occur less frequently but are still of concern.¹

Future mine-action efforts will rely on the various NGOs operating in the country; help from the government seems unlikely but the possibility of renewed use of mines seems probable. Until Pakistan commits itself to abandoning the use of landmines and the establishment of national mine-action institutes, the situation will continue to claim the lives of those in the affected areas. ♦

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