

Lebanon

by Geary Cox and Daniele Ressler [Mine Action Information Center]



Graphic courtesy of MAIC

Lebanon has suffered from decades of conflict and periods of foreign occupation, leaving the country riddled with landmines and other explosive remnants of war.¹ In July 2006, the country found itself at the center of international attention with the start of a 34-day conflict between Israel and the militant Shiite group Hezbollah, which operates out of the southern part of Lebanon. Of particular concern has been the reported use of cluster munitions by the Israel Defense Forces—who launched strikes on positions in southern Lebanon suspected to be occupied by Hezbollah militants—and the lasting post-conflict effects of unexploded submunitions.²

Between the beginning of Lebanon's civil war in 1975 and the end of Israeli occupation in 2000, mines and other ordnance were used extensively throughout the country. While Lebanon is not known to have produced or exported landmines, the Lebanese Army maintains a stockpile of unknown size.³

Extent of Contamination

Although more than 25 square kilometers (10 square miles) have been cleared of mines and unexploded ordnance since 1982, much land remains contaminated by mines and UXO from previous conflicts⁴ and continues to be affected by the most recent conflict. The heaviest concentration of landmines is in southern Lebanon—up to 75 percent of the estimated 400,000 mines in Lebanon are thought to be in this region.⁴ Additionally, the estimated one million unexploded submunitions left after the 2006 conflict are concentrated in the southern part of the country.⁵ In 2004, more than two square kilometers (one square mile) of land were cleared, with 2,929 anti-personnel mines, 287 anti-vehicle mines and 5,991 pieces of UXO destroyed.³

Since 1975, more than 4,000 people have been killed or injured by landmines or UXO in Lebanon, though the number of annual casualties has decreased significantly since the implementation of mine-risk education.⁴ Between 2000 and 2004, the Lebanese National Demining Office reported 44 deaths and 283 injuries from landmine- and UXO-related accidents. Victims were predominately males aged 31 to 40; however, 28 percent of all victims were under the age of 15.

Since the end of the recent conflict, civilian casualty rates have increased substantially. Between August 14, 2006, when the ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah was signed, and November 11, there were 23 deaths and 136 injuries due to ERW, mostly from unexploded submunitions. Of these, seven of those killed and 49 of those injured were under the age of 18.⁵ In addition to cluster munition and landmine casualties, there are also troubling but unconfirmed reports that depleted-uranium bombs (DUBs) used by

Israel during the recent conflict may have contaminated the region with unknown amounts of radiation, which Israel has strongly denied.⁶

Lebanon's Landmine Impact Survey, completed in 2003 and released in 2005, found 28 highly impacted communities and more than 250 communities ranking as low or medium impact.³ Landmines also plague the coastal areas near Beirut, Tabarja and Tripoli. After the recent conflict, over 800 cluster-bomb strike locations have been identified as of November 13, 2006, covering 32.7 million square meters (9,100 acres).⁵ The United Nations also identified a minefield after four clearance personnel were injured, and found evidence of at least one intact and new Israeli-produced No. 4 anti-personnel landmine which it claims was emplaced during the recent conflict.⁷

National Demining Capacity

Demining efforts in Lebanon are coordinated by the National Demining Office, established in 1998 to handle interagency cooperation for national humanitarian mine action. The Ministry of Defense is responsible for mine-action efforts via the NDO, which is part of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

After Israeli forces withdrew from southern Lebanon in May 2000, international attention was brought to the emplaced mines in that region. Assistance from the United Nations was provided through the U.N.-established Mine Action Coordination Centre–South Lebanon and the Ukrainian Battalion stationed with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (working in-country since 1978).

Although the Republic of Lebanon has not acceded to the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention,⁸ it publicly recognized the importance of the Convention's ideals at the First Review Conference in late 2004. In declining to accede to the Convention, Lebanon cited its ongoing conflict with Israel and said it would join when the conflict ended. Lebanon is also not a member of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons or its Amended Protocol II.^{3, 9}

No national mine-action legislation exists, but Lebanon completed its End-State Strategy for Mine Action¹⁰ and Long-Term Plan (2005–09)¹¹ in August 2004. It plans to clear all high- and medium-priority areas by late 2010 with the goal of rendering the country "impact free"¹² in 10 to 15 years. It is not yet clear if this strategy will maintain the same timeline with the advent of the most recent conflict in Lebanon.

The last landmines known to be laid in the country were emplaced by Israel and non-state armed groups (probably Hezbollah) in 1999. Hezbollah has refused to sign the Geneva Call's Deed of Commitment for Non-state Actors,¹³ saying it is a nationally recognized political group and not a non-state actor.³

MACC–SL reported that in the month of June 2006, 17,313 square meters (4 acres) of land was cleared and returned to the community.¹⁴ Despite progress to address land contamination, the recent conflict with Israel brought most demining efforts to a standstill. Mines Advisory Group, which had maintained a national staff of 80, was forced to suspend operations July 12.¹⁵ MAG's staff—four mine-action teams, one mechanical team and an operational base/workshop—resumed work shortly after the cessation of hostilities, with an increased number of clearance personnel clearing submunitions and other ERW. MAG reports clearance teams are working more 12-hour shifts to clear UXO, including cluster bombs, rockets and other munitions. MAG teams cleared 1,835 submunitions within two weeks of the ceasefire. Priority is being given to roads and paths, then to gardens and roadsides, and finally to destroyed buildings intended for reconstruction.

In addition, more than 350 personnel from the Lebanese Army and around 200 personnel from private corporations and nongovernmental organizations, working with troops from UNIFIL, are now being coordinated by the Mine Action Coordination Centre to clear southern Lebanon.¹⁶ According to the United Nations, as of November 4, over 45,000 cluster submunitions have been cleared and destroyed by these groups.¹⁷

Services to the Public

The NDO serves as the central organization providing mine-risk education in Lebanon. In late 2004, all schools in mine-affected areas received MRE materials and 625 teachers were trained in MRE. Since the recent conflict, UNICEF has been working with the NDO to implement an MRE print and broadcast media campaign for adults and children.¹⁷

MRE in Lebanon has been hindered by a lack of resources, the paradox of developing an MRE-campaign while simultaneously trying to promote tourism and economic growth, and the challenge of establishing MRE for newly defined at-risk groups as threats change.⁴ The dissemination of MRE has primarily occurred in villages and communities, universities and rehabilitation facilities, and during military training.⁴ As with all other demining-related activities, the long-term success of Lebanon's MRE efforts remains contingent on regional stability, or lack thereof. This is exemplified in the recent recurrence of conflict, which resulted in additional extensive explosive threats from submunitions and other ERW in the south, and an increased need for MRE services for a vulnerable population.

Survivor assistance is provided as part of the End-State Strategy through the National Mine Victim Assistance Committee. Medical, social, psychological and economic services are coordinated by NMVAC with support from international NGOs and national agencies. One in five hospitals in the south has the necessary facilities to provide care to landmine victims; though the government pays for initial care, funds are not available for long-term care.³

Prior to the recent conflict, the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Social Affairs and NGOs operated 38 physical rehabilitation centers with the MoH or Council of the South covering the cost of prostheses, physiotherapy and rehabilitation. NGOs that provide services are later reimbursed.

The Future for Demining

The possibility of a mine- and UXO-free Lebanon is subject to conjecture and uncertainty given recent regional turmoil and ongoing disputes among Lebanon, Hezbollah, Israel, the country's other neighbors, and international players. The best opportunity for progress would be signing international agreements prohibiting the use of indiscriminate weapons.

The full impact of landmines and UXO remained significant prior to recent conflict, denying civilians access to land for development and agriculture. Travel is also hindered by UXO contamination, impeding the return of internally displaced persons. The recent conflict between Hezbollah and Israel has been especially detrimental to mine-action efforts because IDF offensive tactics included the destruction of most major roads and infrastructure across the country.¹⁸

Clearance of unexploded submunitions in southern Lebanon, not to mention landmines, will take at least 12 to 15 months, according to United Nations' estimates.¹⁷ There are potentially millions of unexploded submunitions in addition to other ERW. This means that in both the immediate and long-term future, it will be vital that contributions to demining efforts in the region remain high to ensure the preservation of peace and stability, and the opportunity for reconstruction and growth. For a more thorough review of the effects of the recent conflict, see [The Aftermath of War](#).

Biographies



Geary Cox is an Editorial Assistant for the *Journal of Mine Action* and a graduate student at James Madison University. Having received a bachelor's degree in English and political science from JMU in 2005, he is pursuing his Master of Arts in English with a concentration in creative writing.



Daniele Ressler works as a Researcher, Writer and Assistant Editor for the *Journal of Mine Action*. She holds a Master of Science in violence, conflict and development studies from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies. She has studied in Switzerland as well, earning a Certificate for Applied Studies in peacemaking. Daniele has previously worked in Washington, D.C., and Seattle, Washington, in the field of conflict management, and has also lived in Nairobi, Kenya.

Endnotes

1. **Editor's Note:** Some organizations consider mines and ERW to be two separate entities since they are regulated by different legal documents (the former by the Ottawa Convention and Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, the latter by CCW Protocol V). However, since mines are explosive devices that have similar effects to other ERW and it is often impossible to separate the two during clearance operations, some in the community have adopted a "working definition" (as opposed to a legal one) of ERW in which it is a blanket term that includes mines, UXO, abandoned explosive ordnance and other explosive devices.
2. "Israeli Cluster Munitions Hit Civilians in Lebanon." Human Rights Watch. July 24, 2006. <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/24/isrlpa13798.htm>. Accessed November 27, 2006.
3. "Lebanon." *Landmine Monitor Report* 2005. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2005/lebanon.html>. Accessed November 27, 2006. Updated November 15, 2005.
4. Lebanese National Demining Office. <http://www.ndo-lb.org>. Accessed November 27, 2006.
5. "War 2006." Mine Action Information Coordination Centre–South Lebanon. <http://www.maccsl.org/War%202006.htm>. Accessed November 27, 2006.
6. "Robert Fisk: Secret of Israel's secret uranium bomb." *The Independent*. October 28, 2006. <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/fisk/article1935945.ece>. Accessed January 2, 2007.
7. "IDF Trains UN Teams in Lebanon in Disposal of Cluster Bombs." November 23, 2006. *Haaretz*. <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/pages/ShArt.jhtml?itemNo=791543>. Accessed November 28, 2006.
8. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*, Oslo, Norway. September 18, 1997. http://www.un.org/Depts/mine/UNDocs/ban_trty.htm. Accessed November 27, 2006. The document was opened for signature in Ottawa, Canada, December 3, 1997, and thus is commonly known as the Ottawa Convention.
9. *Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects*, Geneva, Switzerland, October 10, 1980. <http://www.ccw-treaty.com/KeyDocs/ccw-treatytext.htm>. Accessed November 27, 2006.
10. "End-State Strategy (ESS) in Lebanon." National Demining Office. <http://www.ndo-lb.org/ndocorp/pdf/ESS.pdf>. Accessed November 27, 2006.
11. "Lebanon Mine Action Plan, National Demining Office: Working for a Lebanon Free from the Impact of Landmines—Long Term Plan 2005–2009." National Demining Office. <http://www.ndo-lb.org/ndocorp/pdf/LTP-2005-2009.pdf>. Accessed November 27, 2006.
12. **Editor's Note:** Some countries and mine-action organizations are urging the use of the term "mine free," while others are espousing the terms "mine safe" or "impact free." "Mine free" connotes a condition where all landmines have been cleared, whereas the terms "mine safe" and "impact free" refer to the condition in which landmines no longer pose a credible threat to a community or country.
13. Geneva Call is an organization with the goal of involving non-state actors in mine action. Signatories of the *Deed of Commitment for Adherence to a Total Ban on Anti-Personnel Mines and for Cooperation in Mine Action* agree to end their use of landmines and begin the process of demining. See <http://www.genevacall.org/about/testi-mission/gc-04oct01-deed.htm>. Accessed November 27, 2006.
14. "Report of the Mine Action Coordination Center of Southern Lebanon." Mine Action Information Coordination Centre–South Lebanon. June 2006. http://www.maccsl.org/reports_06.htm. Accessed November 27, 2006.
15. "Lebanon Crisis Update 4." October 2006. Mines Advisory Group. <http://www.mag.org.uk/news.php?p=5325&a=0>. Accessed November 27, 2006.
16. "Humanitarian Operations Phasing Down As Lebanon Recovery Moves Ahead." *Europaworld*. September 29, 2006. <http://www.europaworld.org/week279/humanitarian29906.html>. Accessed November 27, 2006.
17. "South Lebanon Cluster Bomb Info Sheet." Mine Action Coordination Centre–South Lebanon. November 4, 2006. <http://www.maccsl.org/reports/Leb%20UXO%20Fact%20Sheet%204%20November,%202006.pdf>. Accessed November 27, 2006.

18. "Israel/Lebanon: Deliberate Destruction or 'Collateral Damage'? Israeli Attacks on Civilian Infrastructure." August 23, 2006. Amnesty International. <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde180072006>. Accessed September 28, 2006.

Contact Information

Geary Cox
Editorial Assistant
Journal of Mine Action
E-mail: maic@jmu.edu

Daniele Ressler
Researcher / Assistant Editor
Journal of Mine Action
E-mail: maic@jmu.edu