MAIC, the Catalyst

JMU’s MAIC is especially proud of the role it has played in facilitating partnerships and highlighting capabilities and contributions. Often, as in Bangkok or Miami, the MAIC has conducted conferences dedicated to bringing together various groups in a region who we felt could learn from each other. We try to spot these opportunities whenever we can and do our best to bring diverse groups closer together for integration and coordination. Such a meeting occurred in Tampa, Fla., in 2000, when militaries from 27 countries working on landmine clearance came together to share ideas and commonalities. It has also happened at every Senior Managers Course we have taught.

In Summary

As I sit here and allow the sights and sensations of the past 10 years to drift by, I realize two things: that in spite of my efforts to do so, I cannot possibly recall more than a few of JMU’s achievements. Most of them are not measurable—ah yes, the final obstacle to gauging effectiveness. They are indeed subjective and if I can quote a respected colleague, Hendrik Ehlers of Menschen gegen Minen, the effectiveness of our programs “can only be measured by the smiles on the faces” of a reclaimed people.

Secondly, our (all of us involved in mine-action) efforts are indeed performing one action, one person, one event at a time, making the “whole” quite indiscernible from the component parts. Mine action is a little like looking at an American quilt. You can admire the details that go into its making, but when you step back to look at the whole, the component parts are lost in the overall beauty.

It is our hope that over the past decade we at the JMU MAIC have helped stitch this wonderful quilt together and that our contributions, as subjective as they may be, have helped give it shape, beauty and function.

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He has coordinated civil-military actions with NGOs and the United Nations in Panama, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kurdistan and Haiti.

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An Alternative Perspective on Landmines and Vulnerable Populations

By offering a different view on the International Campaign to Ban Landmines’ dominant message concerning mine action, this article presents an argument for possible alternatives. The author brings up such points as a lack of discussion and an acceptance of facts without proper checking of research. In addition, suggestions of constructive use of landmines in the defense of vulnerable populations are made to refute the idea of a necessary worldwide ban.

people living in areas infected with landmines are quite aware of the impact these mines have on their well-being. For those of us living in “the developed world,” public awareness of the impact of landmines is due largely to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines. From this campaign we have learned of the physical, psychological, economic and environmental damage caused by landmines left over from past conflicts. We have also learned of ways in which, contrary to the dictates of responsible use, landmines are used to terrorize civilian populations. That the most vulnerable populations in the world sustain much of this damage makes this senseless violence particularly heinous.

From what we have heard, we might easily infer that landmines are inherently problematic. However, focusing solely on these harms gives the false impression that only bad consequences result from landmine use. Furthermore, these arguments fail to consider that bad, perhaps worse, consequences can result from a failure to...
use landmines, obscuring the fact that there also have been and continue to be contrac-
tory claims with respect to vulner-
able populations. I argue that landmines do not and should not be used to protect vulner-
able populations. Consequently, the wholesale stigmatization of the production and use of landmines diminishes the vulnerability of some of the populations that the ICBL in-
tends to protect.

Anti-landmine Rhetoric

Genuine, open dialogue and debate regarding the production and use of land-
mines has been rather restricted. There are at least three possible explanations for this, which need not be mutually exclusive:

1. The superiority of the arguments against landmines has more or less resolved any questions that would generate open dialogue and debate.
2. The ways in which arguments against landmines are presented, rather than the content of the arguments, tend to shut down open dialogue and debate.
3. The people with the kind of field ex-
perience and insight to revise or reject the arguments against landmines must “see the line” if they want to keep their jobs, Kearves contests, power and prestige that comes with managing the response to the land-
mine issue.

As long as explanation Nos. 2 and 3 remain viable, we should be deeply skeptical of No. 1. I will focus on explanation No. 2.

The strategy of ban proponents is fairly clear. According to Canadian Deputy Permanent Representative Ambassador to the United Nations Gilbert Laurin, “Meas-
uring landmine survivors—most of them civ-
ilians and almost half of them children—is the best way to dispel forever the myth of ‘responsible use’ of landmines. It is the most powerful way of convincing all states that an outright ban on this weapon is the only fea-
sible way forward.”

The landmine survivors are there merely to attract attention, although that is a necessary first step. Their plight is to be taken as a moral argument that refutes any claims that landmines can be regulated or designed to prevent such incidents—landmines in campaigns to protect civilian populations, at least in the context of Sarajevo.

Most of us will never meet a landmine survivor; instead, we are shown graphs, pho-
tos and are presented with disturbing details of their suffering. Without the photos, many people could not begin to comprehend what is at stake for a landmine victim; the images jar us from our complacency. One scholar de-
scribes this as “priming” the audience.

Problems with the strategy emerge after the audience has been primed. The audi-
ence has not merely acquired new facts with which to make more informed judgments. Emotional reactions to the photos include shock, disgust and anger. Fortunately, these reactions urge us to help. Unfortunately, be-
cause the photos and stories are shown in the context of supporting the ICBL, the ICBL has commanded allegiance to the victims by linking the images to head-
lines to their agenda. The implication is that if one believes that landmines might serve useful purposes in present and future con-
texts, then one must not be taking seriously enough the trauma inflicted on children re-
sulting from decades’ worth of abandoned landmines in past conflicts. Believing this, many people are revisioning their opposition to landmines.

The lack of discussion also allows un-
substantiated, or not outright indefensible, claims to go unchallenged. Cited figures exaggerate the number of mines deployed, the likely costs of demining and the ex-
pected loss of civilians and demines.

Other claims are technically cor-
rect but function as distortions because they are taken out of context. As Kenneth Rutherford, Co-founder of Landmine Survivor Network, explains, “Many of the

news brief

IDGA’s 3rd Annual Asymmetric Warfare Conference

The Institute for Defense and Government Advancement will host the third-annual Asymmetric Warfare Conference Oct. 16-18, 2006. It will be held at the Westin Arlington Gateway Hotel in Arlington, Va. IDGA’s Asymmetric Warfare conference, “Explosives Detection, Avoidance, and Removal Technologies in the Land Environment,” is a high-level, technology-focused event that will bring together government, military, academia and industry to discuss information on existing warfare detection capabilities, ongoing and future research and developments, requirements for explosives detection, and avoidance and removal technologies. Workshop topics will include:

• Countering the trends in improvised explosive device usage
• Helping to defeat the IED threat: advanced handheld detection (AHED)
• Protecting our troops in hostile regions
• Next generation jamming technologies: staying one step ahead of the enemy
• Developing improved explosive ordnance disposal tools and equipment
• Reliable detection of IEDs in operationally significant environments
• Information resources and delivery systems to enhance response capabilities
• Robotic systems for mine detection: removing the threat
• Developing and improving automatic mine recognition algorithms (ATR): numerical simulation as a tool for developing countermeasures
• Better identifying the presence of explosives through sensor technology
• Addressing and combating chemical and non-conventional threats

For more information or to register for the conference, visit www.idga.org or call +1 800 892 8684.

argue that landmines have de facto served to protect vulnerable populations.”
Sudan presents a variety of problems for mine-action operations. Control of the country, which was achieved in 1985, is now divided between the Sudanese government and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLMA), with government forces claiming the majority of the north and both sides maintaining some control in the south. Both the government and the Sudanese People’s Liberation Army used landmines throughout the civil war and as a result, landmines now pose a serious threat to civilians. For example, the United Nations reports that in 2004, landmines were responsible for more than 15 deaths and 50 injuries. The actual number of deaths and injuries has likely been higher but goes unreported due to the difficulty of access throughout much of the south.

A Firm Foothold:
RONCO Operations in Sudan

Over the past four years, RONCO has established a continuing presence in Sudan, following the Nuba Mountains ceasefire, with the deployment of quick-response teams to conduct emergency mine-clearance tasks. Currently, RONCO is creating and sustaining an indigenous mine-clearance, survey and disposal capacity in southern Sudan on behalf of the United Nations. In addition to the threat of extensively mined roads and infrastructure, RONCO had to overcome a number of obstacles, including inclement weather, disease and an increasing security threat due to rebel activity.

Sudan’s austere and hostile conditions are not dissimilar to those RONCO experienced in Afghanistan and Iraq, but as RONCO has discovered in those two countries, the long-term impact of the work far outweighs its challenges.

See Endnotes, page 109

by John Lundberg [RONCO Consulting Corporation]