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Tajikistan Mine Action Programme

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Tajikistan

Mine Action Programme

The Tajikistan Mine Action Centre is responsible for all mine-action-related programs in the country. The author details Tajikistan's landmine problems and provides a report on TMAC's progress in various aspects of mine action as well as its goals for future mine-related operations.

by Jonmahmad Rajabov
[Tajikistan Mine Action Centre]

Both sides in Tajikistan's five-year civil war in the 1990s used anti-personnel mines and many of these weapons remain in place in the country's central area. Uzbek forces laid APMs along their border with Tajikistan and some remain in disputed territory. Minefields also exist along the border with Afghanistan in land recently handed over to Tajik sovereignty by Russian forces. Nearly 10 years after the end of the civil war, landmines continue to create obstacles for accessing grazing and agricultural land in Tajikistan and cause economic hardship for its people. The problem of landmines and explosive remnants of war contributes to human suffering and livestock loss.

The landmine issue continues to be a source of concern for the government of Tajikistan and demining remains vitally important to national development plans. Foreign-manufactured landmines kill, maim and threaten rural Tajiks who are living in the poorest areas of their own country. Landmines were placed by the Soviet Union, Russian forces (following Tajik independence), the Tajiks themselves, and Uzbek forces along Uzbek-Tajik borders. Areas on the Afghan and Uzbek borders and former battlefields in the central region continue to present a hazard to the rural poor who have to live with the threat of explosive remnants of war as part of their daily lives.

The Tajikistan national government has adopted a long-term strategic plan, one that is linked to mine-action goals and national development plans. The government's



Establishing international cooperation during the meetings of the Standing Committees of the Ottawa Convention.

commitment to mine-action initiatives is visible and increasing. Tajikistan has been a State Party of the Ottawa Convention¹ since 1 April 2000, and the government is also a signatory of Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.²

Humanitarian Impact of AP Mines and UXO

Landmines and items of unexploded ordnance appeared in the central part of Tajikistan during the civil war years when both sides of the conflict used anti-personnel mines and other munitions along the Tajik-Uzbek and Tajik-Afghan borders. The central region incorporates the Tavildara region and the Rasht Valley, as well as parts of the Gorno-Badakhshan region. Landmines, UXO and other remnants of war continue to be a hazard for the people in this region.

Along some parts of the Tajik border with Afghanistan, Russian forces and border troops laid and maintained mines to counter cross-border infiltration and for self-protection. In 2005, Russian forces completed the hand-over process to Tajik colleagues. Mine records were also provided.

Uzbek forces laid APMs along the border with Tajikistan, and the first deaths and injuries involving civilians in this border area were reported in August 1999. Seventy-two deaths and 85 injuries have occurred in these communities, and in excess of 2,000 head of livestock have been lost. Since 1992, 239 people have been injured and 238 killed as the result

of mine accidents in Tajikistan. Children account for 20 percent of these casualties.

The problem of mine contamination seriously affects the civil population who are engaged in farming, wood gathering, grazing and activities related to normal rural life. Landmines also adversely affect agricultural development, the environment and the economy of the country. Almost all the inhabitants within at-risk communities have received mine-risk education and awareness training. Still, economic imperatives drive local populations to continue visiting hazardous areas, which often results in death and injury.

Tajikistan Mine Action Centre

On 20 June 2003, the Tajik government signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme called "Support to the Tajikistan National Mine Action Programme," and the Tajikistan Mine Action Centre was established. The Centre is a governmental structure and is responsible for all mine-action-related issues in Tajikistan. It is also the executive authority of the national Commission on Implementation of International Humanitarian Law.

Planning, Monitoring and Coordinating

TMAC develops mine-action plans (strategic and annual), national standards and other strategic documents related to mine action and submits them to the Commission on the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law for approval. Implementation of the Tajik Mine Action Programme is in accordance with the Mine Action Strategic Five-year Plan for 2004–08 and the Annual Plan, which CIIHL approved on 13 April 2004.

TMAC is responsible for coordinating and monitoring all mine-action activities in Tajikistan. Within this framework, TMAC updates the national mine-action plan and undertakes the development, priority selection, planning and coordination of operations. It also prioritizes new tasks, confirms completion of tasks and gives certificates of cleared sites to local authorities. TMAC provides its partners with information on mined areas and operations obtained from the Information Management System for Mine Action, as well as on mine incidents and mine survivors.

TMAC quality-assurance officers confirm that demining management methods and procedures are in accordance with national and international standards.

TMAC's major partners are the UNDP, the Organization for Security

and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross, UNICEF, the Tajikistan Red Crescent, representatives of the donor countries in Tajikistan, *Fondation Suisse de Déminage*, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, Ministries of Security, Justice, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Education, Labour and Social Protection, Defence, Health, and Emergency Situations, the State Committee for Protection of the State Border and local executive authorities.

Mine Clearance

In accordance with Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention, each State Party undertakes to destroy or ensure the destruction of all AP mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control, as soon as possible but not later than 10 years after the entry into force of this, for Tajikistan this deadline is 1 April 2010.

As a signatory to the Convention, Tajikistan completed destruction of its stockpiles (3,029 AP mines) on 31 March 2004. The Ministry of Defence, supported by *Fondation Suisse de Déminage*, undertook the destruction.

On 20 June 2003, the government signed an agreement with FSD. Funding is channelled through the UNDP and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and FSD is now the national survey and mine-clearance partner in Tajikistan, with four survey and four mine-clearance teams. More than 100 mined areas have been identified so far as a result of survey operations.

In 2004, three mined areas were cleared and handed over to local authorities for future use. Since the Technical Survey and mine clearance started in July 2004, more than 180,000 square metres (44 acres) and more than 2,000 mines and items of UXO have been cleared.

To speed the process of mine clearance, TMAC plans to establish four mine-detecting dog teams. TMAC thinks this issue is very important for the programme, and the Centre is looking for donors to fund the project.

Mine-risk Education

The Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan, supported by the ICRC and UNDP, is undertaking MRE in 14 districts of the country (border areas of the Sugd region, the Rasht valley and Vanj, and the Darvoz districts of the Gorno Badakhshan region). In August 2005, UNICEF initiated a small, joint pilot project together with the Ministry of Education of Tajikistan. RCST and UNICEF volunteers

conduct complementary activities to educate the local population about mine hazards and how to live with landmines.

More than 3,200 large mine-hazard warning signs have been manufactured and more than 2,200 were placed in border areas in the Sugd region. The remainder will be erected in the southern part of the country. In addition, to provide more information on MRE activities, the U.N. booklet *Guideline to Mine & UXO Safety* was translated and 6,000 copies in Tajik and 3,000 copies in Uzbek languages were distributed. More than 22,000 leaflets were issued with appropriate guidelines for distribution by the programme's volunteers, military personnel, local authorities, teachers and active advocates of the programme.

Assistance to Survivors

A project called Assistance to Landmine Survivors, implemented within the framework of cooperation among the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan, ICRC, UNDP and RCST, assists disabled persons, including landmine survivors, by providing prostheses and medical assistance in the national Orthopaedic Centre, Dushanbe. An income-generation project implemented by RCST in 2005 delivered breeding pairs of goats or sheep to 72 landmine survivors in three mine-affected districts of the Sugd region and three mine-affected districts of Rasht valley. These individuals can now establish small-scale livestock enterprises, each returning one offspring to the RCST to redistribute and expand the project. There is a need to extend this project in the future to provide for all mine survivors.



A deminer works at mine clearance.



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TMAC, in cooperation with the MLSPP, ICRC, UNDP, and RCS, organized a summer camp for 32 mine survivors in Romit valley of the Vahdat district in July 2005. The camp provided the survivors an opportunity for psychological rehabilitation and social integration.

Advocacy

A regional conference, “Progress towards the Ottawa Convention’s Aims in Central Asia,” was held 15–16 April 2004, in Dushanbe. The conference was organized by the UNDP with the support of the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining. Official representatives of central Asian countries and Afghanistan, the UNDP, the OCSE, the GICHD, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and the ICRC, representatives of diplomatic corps and international organizations registered in Tajikistan, governmental authorities and NGO representatives took part in the conference. Participants discussed the implementation process of the Ottawa Convention in the region on the eve of the First Review Conference in Nairobi, Kenya. The conference adopted a statement that stressed the necessity of support for the process of the Ottawa Convention and the need for the central Asian countries to accede to the Convention. It pleased officials that Her Majesty Queen Noor of Jordan took part in the conference.

The official delegation of the Republic of Tajikistan took part in the First Review Conference in Nairobi and made a presentation about the process of implementing the Ottawa Convention. TMAC and other governmental representatives continue to take an active role in international conferences and meetings on the banning of anti-personnel mines. TMAC conducts ongoing training, meetings, liaison and other activities as part of the process of implementation of the Tajikistan Mine Action Programme.

Reporting

In accordance with Article 7 of the Ottawa Convention, the Republic of Tajikistan submits its annual reports to the U.N. Secretary-General on the country’s mine-contamination status and on the completion process to comply with the Convention.

Conclusion

The Civil War of the 1990s created a mine/UXO problem for Tajikistan that is still threatening the daily lives of its citizens a decade later. The Tajikistan Mine Action Centre is remedying the devastating effects this problem has had on the country. TMAC, with international support, has started and will continue to make huge strides in mine/UXO clearance, mine-risk education and victim assistance. ❖

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developing a successful strategy for engaging these groups in the landmine ban. Four reasons for mine use were identified as the purpose of the report:

1. Offensive
2. Defensive
3. Economic gain
4. So-called “nuisance mining”

Many NSAs use landmines in an offensive manner; for example, the CPN-M in Nepal, the Kurdistan People’s Congress/*Partiya Karkeran Kurdistan* (Kongra-Gel/PKK) in Turkey, the Communist Party of India–Maoist in India, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, offensive use is probably significantly over-reported since it is more visible.

NSAs often confirm not only offensive but also defensive mine uses. Indeed, according to a majority of NSAs, landmines are mainly utilized for defensive purposes. The Burmese Rohingya Solidarity Organization has admitted to using mines to defend its camps and bases as well as to protect its members from robbery or from the Bangladeshi Army. The Chin National Front (Burma/Myanmar) has also admitted to using mines for self-defense, apparently to protect its camps.

Landmine use for economic purposes is not frequently reported, although this is probably due to underreporting rather than the insignificance of this kind of use. For example, *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* allegedly utilizes landmines for the protection of coca plantations, whereas the Movement of the Democratic Forces of Casamance in Senegal is thought to plant landmines to hinder the local population from benefiting from economically profitable land.

As for nuisance mining, the most cited example is probably that of the Lord’s Resistance Army. Nuisance mining is the use of mines that serve no direct military or economic purpose. This includes using mines to interfere with strategic infrastructure, such as communications and railways, or to affect civilians. Other examples are groups in Colombia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. FARC allegedly placed mines at the entrances of a town and in houses and vehicles before the army took over the area.³

Command-detonation

NSAs frequently use landmines offensively, targeting state security forces or other individuals linked to the state. In many cases, NSAs are present at the time and place of the landmine attacks. This suggests that for these NSAs, command-detonated land-

mines may be an alternative, and hence, a total ban on AP mines may be possible.

There is currently a trend in many conflicts towards increased use of command-detonated mines. However, although command-detonation is clearly preferable from a humanitarian point of view to victim and vehicle activation, this does not constitute a guarantee that civilians and humanitarian actors will not be victimized, as became evident in the tragic incident in Nepal’s Chitwan district in June 2005.⁶

Widespread Production and Use of IEDs

Around 40 groups globally produced and used improvised explosive devices between 2003 and 2005.² This indicates that a strategy that solely targets access to factory-made landmines and explosives is not sufficient. Easy access to materials necessary to manufacture IEDs, as well as knowledge and technology transfers among NSAs, has un-

“There is currently a trend in many conflicts towards increased use of command-detonated mines.”

doubtedly contributed to spreading the landmine problem. Nevertheless, IEDs do not always constitute indiscriminate weapons as this depends on how they are put to use.

Sources of Factory-made Mines

Factory-made landmines are accessible to NSAs through at least three sources:

1. Minefields or stocks
2. Certain state sponsors
3. Other NSAs or the black market

One of the main sources of factory-made landmines for NSAs is the very state against which they are fighting. Incidents of NSAs managing to loot or capture landmines from the state are reported regularly. Such has repeatedly been the case in the Philippines and Burma/Myanmar. NSAs have also reported that soldiers from state armies have offered to sell them landmines. Furthermore, foreign

state sponsors are thought to supply NSAs with factory-made mines.

Large areas of the world are not under the effective control of any state, a fact facilitating the trafficking of arms and IED-making material among NSAs. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in some post-conflict situations there is no need for NSAs or individuals to look for sources of mines since weapons, including mines, are plentiful and easily available, as in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia.

Different NSAs have allegedly transferred to each other not only arms and explosives but also the knowledge and technology on how to manufacture landmines, as in Burma/Myanmar, India and the Philippines. There are also allegations that some transfers are of a more permanent character and include the joint running of camps. Indeed, it has been asserted on more than one occasion that there have been intense contacts between the Nepalese CPN-M and some Indian Maoists (CPI-M), including joint training.⁷

Impact of NSA Mine Use

The impact of NSA mine use is in many respects similar to the impact of state mine use. However, it appears that NSA mines are more widely dispersed than state mines and non-state actors are usually less prone to mark or map their mines.

The humanitarian impact of NSA mine use is difficult to measure, since it takes place in a conflict situation, in areas where little or no mine action is taking place and where civilians may fear reporting mine incidents. In addition, the humanitarian impact of NSA mine use is difficult to distinguish from that of the conflict itself until the conflict has ended and information becomes available through mine-action efforts. The impact of former mine use by NSAs (anti-personnel and anti-vehicle)

“The humanitarian impact of NSA mine use is difficult to measure, since it takes place in a conflict situation, in areas where little or no mine action is taking place and where civilians may fear reporting mine incidents.”

can be seen in Angola, South Sudan and Sri Lanka.

NSAs all over the world are victimized by their own mines, as well as those deployed by governments, paramilitaries and other NSAs. The fact that their own combatants are also victimized could be used in negotiations for a mine ban with NSAs. Access to victim assistance for combatants who have suffered mine incidents could also be used as a carrot in negotiations.

Effects of AV Mine Use

Some 30 NSAs used AV mines between 2003 and 2005.² As is shown in numerous studies, AV mines triggered by vehicles are also indiscriminate weapons. However, since NSAs in many conflicts largely depend on these weapons, it appears unlikely that many of them would agree to a total ban on AV mines. Nevertheless, some NSAs have expressed an interest in also banning these weapons.

Need for Prioritization

When engaging NSAs, priorities must be set as to when and where to allocate scarce resources: If humanitarian actors target a group that is a frequent user and manage to involve it in the mine ban, the benefits for the population are greater; yet a sporadic user or non-user may be more open to renouncing the use of mines since mines are not a crucial part of its military strategy.

The Global Report, by explaining specific characteristics of the NSAs and their mine use, intends to provide a background tool for humanitarian actors to strategize regarding which non-state actors to target and what the appropriate approaches might be. For instance, one way of conducting advocacy is through direct contact with a group’s leadership. Another way is by disseminating

mine-ban information within civil society in order to create a bottom-up pressure on the group. In addition, understanding regional patterns is essential, since these may have important consequences for the engagement and implementation of strategies for a mine ban. This may be particularly true in cases where regional dynamics appear to fuel the landmine problem or provide possibilities for its solution.

NSA Involvement in Mine Action

Considering the disastrous effects of landmine use, there is a requirement for national and international agencies to undertake mine action in areas where NSAs operate and/or are in control, as encouraged in Action 46 of the Nairobi Action Plan.⁸ Given the benefits of mine action to affected populations, it is indefensible for the concerned governments to allow such actions.

Indeed, NSAs are contributing to mine action in different areas around the world, notably in Sudan, Sri Lanka and Iraqi Kurdistan. In order to map the benefits and challenges related to the involvement of non-state actors in humanitarian demining and to encourage other NSAs to ban anti-personnel mines and get involved in mine action, there is a need to further investigate current mine-action efforts undertaken by these actors in conflict and post-conflict situations. Geneva Call is currently working on such a report about NSA mine action. In fact, the *Global Report* is part of a bigger project that studies the negative and positive implications of NSAs in the landmine problem. This project grew out of the realization that only by understanding NSA- and region-specific dynamics is it possible to address the current and future landmine problem as it relates to NSAs.

Conclusion

The *Global Report* clearly demonstrates a need to discuss the mine issue with non-state actors. Many NSAs (as well as states) lack the long-term perspective of the consequences of mine use, and it is therefore crucial for the international community to find channels of communication with NSAs on the AP mine issue. Parties to conflict often use accusations of AP mine use to discredit the other party because of the stigmatization of such arms following the Ottawa process, but also because of the natural “perception of landmines as an illegitimate type of weapon.”⁹ NSAs, as well as states, are thus reluctant to admit they are using a victim-activated weapon. This suggests an inclusive approach—involving advocacy based on accurate information—could be the key to success for spreading a mine ban among NSAs. ♦

This article is drawn from a report produced by Geneva Call, Armed Non-State Actors and Landmines, Volume I: A Global Report Profiling NSAs and their Use, Acquisition, Production, Transfer and Stockpiling of Landmines,² which was published in November 2005. The report can be downloaded from Geneva Call’s Web site at <http://www.genevacall.org>. Hard copies can be obtained by writing to info@genevacall.org.

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