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The \$64,000 question: How are we going to remove all landmines in ten years?

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Focus on Machine Assisted Demining

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The \$64,000 question: How are we going to remove all landmines in ten years?

Thorsten Peter, of Flensburger Fahrzeugbau Gesellschaft, manufacturers of the MINEBREAKER 2000 offers insight into the challenges of mechanical landmine clearance.

" Humanitarian demining has to be accelerated. We can't go on at the pace we are presently going. It will simply take too long." -Mr. Thorsten Peter.

By Margaret S. Busé

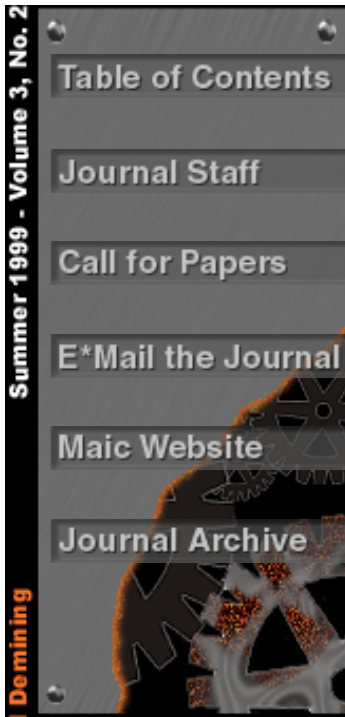
Political and economic considerations have played into landmine clearance and many would argue, get in the way of effective landmine clearance, regardless of the type of clearance method employed. Thorsten Peter feels the political call to have all mines eradicated in ten years, while sound in its principle, will be impossible in actuality. "Following a still existing United Nations statistic, it will take us 1100 years to clear all presently laid landmines at the speed landmine removal currently operates in, that is if no new ones are laid," states Peter.

" Manual mine clearance is labor intensive and painstakingly slow. Without machines we won't solve the problem. We can't look for a silver bullet. We have to use the toolbox approach. Mechanical clearance is one tool in the toolbox." Peter feels that you have to decide what the best tool is for the job. Sometimes, you may know what the best tool is, but you may not be able to have access to it. "The problem with mechanical clearance is that in many cases it is appropriate, but there is no money for it."

"But, mechanical equipment is appropriate regardless of cost. Without machines we won't solve this deadly problem. Regardless of what type of clearance and detection method is used, dogs, GPR, manual or mechanical, the total budget for demining has to be increased across the board," states Peter.

Understanding that equipment is costly and taking methods to reduce costs can result in manufacturers not being able to supply efficient removal. Low cost will not equal greater efficiency, it may, in fact, hamper it.

"It will cost 33 billion dollars to clear all mines right now if no new ones are laid." Peter feels that politicians and policy makers are not taking into account the practical considerations of removing landmines. He feels they set the policy, but those policy makers do not respond with the financial or practical needs necessary to solve the



problems.

Ninety-nine point six (99.6) percent mine free is a policy that Peter feels needs clarification. "Landmine clearance is a dynamic process. We need a qualified, quality assurance system to determine and evaluate what is left by the machines. No one is asking the people of the area how they feel, and what the land will be used for after it is clear. Will it be a playground? Farmland? At the end of the day it makes a difference. The people have to have input as to what will be acceptable for them."

FFG has developed, at its own expense, a prototype for mechanical humanitarian demining applications, the MINEBREAKER 2000. After extensive first trials, the system was successfully deployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina between November 1997 and June 1998 under the framework of a field test under realistic conditions. During this time more than 330,000 m² containing some 600 anti-personnel as well as anti-tank mines were cleared. The findings from the trials and field test have been incorporated into the first series-produced model MINEBREAKER 200/2.

Thorsten Peter's report in the Profiles section of this Journal summarizes conditions for mechanical mine clearance, the MINEBREAKER 2000, field test results, and conclusions for mechanically assisted demining.