



From the Director's Desks



The Whole Is Greater Than The Sum Of Its Parts

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In late 1997, I attended a major humanitarian demining conference. A workshop there focused on the requirements of operators. My first question to the working group: "What is a demining operator?" Is he only a mine clearer, or are we indeed concerned with operators involved across the demining activity spectrum, e.g. victim assistance, personnel, mine awareness practitioners, management trainers, etc. My question was quickly dismissed as being trivial. Deminers were clearers.

There were also questions raised about the use of probes, dogs, machines, robots, and sensors to locate landmines, and of foam, explosives, robots, and vehicles to neutralize the landmines. The debates were marked by a strong "either, or" or "take it leave it" mentality. For instance, some operators swore that dogs were the key to successful demining, others rejected the use of dogs altogether.

At the conclusion of that conference there was a spirited discussion about how demining efforts could be better coordinated. The attendees were not in agreement about this just like they were not in agreement about demining tactics. They were not about to commit to any system, which would put a demining group at the mercy of another demining group. Except for some excellent hallway discussions, there was no plan for concerted or coordinated planning or operating. We departed as a hundred and thirty individuals – somewhat more enlightened – but still acting as independent agents committed to demining. I left wondering how humanitarian demining could achieve the necessary coordination of its growing number of activities and players, while at the same time eschewing the concept of authoritative leadership and focused responsibility.

It's now been 18 months since that demining conference, and time is at hand to assess the nature of the demining community and how well it has done at integrating and coordinating activities and operations.

Global Demining Leadership – A Brave New World

My first observation is that no one organization has yet been tapped as the anointed leader of global humanitarian demining. The United Nations Mine Action Service was created to give focus to this effort, but of course cannot act in a directive manner. Canada has led in several demining forays, based on their claim of spiritual leadership during the Ban movement. The U.S. has (in a manifestation of her dedication to demining in spite of her reluctance to sign the Ottawa Treaty) provided direction. This

was charted in time as well as in function by the 2010 agenda under the auspices of the newly formed office of Global Humanitarian Demining. The Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining has signaled its intention to coordinate mine action efforts. The Joint Research Centre at Ispra has given the European Union a platform for leading various demining ventures. The pioneers and early pathfinders of the whole demining process (such as Mine Actions Group, Halo Trust, and Norwegian People's Aid) continued their solid work, and to varying degrees treated the process with studied indifference. Thus no one organization, donor country, or NGO captured the flag.

Instead, what seems to have happened is that many solid and capable organizations (including those mentioned above) are working together to coordinate research and development, policy, operational, and technical efforts. In spite of the fact that no one is "in charge," there has been created, an informal, practical (but admittedly imprecise), and evolving method of forming demining "policy" and creating an ad hoc oversight system.

The vehicle for this effort seems to have been a series of conferences and meetings, which regularly attracts a remarkable set of officials who continually craft procedures and solutions which they discuss, modify, and promulgate as "the tour" continues. It is very interesting to note that while most of these officials deplore the seeming redundant nature and number of these conferences, most of the demining procedures, plans, partnerships, and policies are derived as a direct result of discussions and consensus crafted there. And many organizations, which at first pooh-poohed the efforts of the conferees have recently hurried to become part of the process.

Mine Action – A Comprehensive Approach

Another result, which has occurred is that humanitarian demining is no longer considered to be the exclusive domain of the mine clearer. All regions, including affected Arabic and African countries, are devising *development* plans, which have as their central focus, the prioritization of mine affected areas and their subsequent economic and social use.

Mine action programs at first targeted mine awareness, then victim assistance components. Victim assistance was then expanded to include long and short-term measures. Mine action centers tried to coordinate these activities as well as mine clearance operations, clearance training, and even management training techniques.

Today, most mine threatened areas, are the object of some type of a comprehensive plan which takes into account (even if unable to resource) various mine awareness activities to include logistics, transportation, humanitarian assistance, refugee resettlement, and translation services.

In Africa, the German GTZ is coordinating mine awareness with marking and monitoring efforts. In Angola, MgM is as much concerned with social infrastructure as with mine clearance. In the Sudan, saving farm animals and restoring agriculture are key "demining" priorities. In areas where developmental goals are not driving demining efforts, such as in the BeKaa Valley in Lebanon, lush farmland is eroding and leaving a moonscape of rocks behind.

An Operational Balance

In response to the overused, but valid concept of using the entire tool box (golf bag, kit bag, etc.) the demining community seems to have understood that many instruments and approaches can be used to reclaim land in a mine threatened area. The demining community seems to have made astonishing progress in this regard. We need to stop and reflect on the number of obstacles that have been overcome to have reached this level of coordination and application. For not only did many technologies and means have to be taken into account, but more formidably, the demining world had to leave many cherished (and in some cases fictional) concerns behind.

Remember 1989 when the U.S. military effort to oust Noriega was not even coordinated properly among U.S. government agencies. By 1995, the desire to restore democracy in Haiti, stirred the U.S. government to coordinate a government-wide political military plan, which also integrated the operations of numerous NGOs. The political and operational landscape had changed much in six years.

The organizations and countries involved in humanitarian demining underwent the same kind of cultural change. For-profit organizations, altruistic charities, donor countries, regional organizations, UN agencies, threatened nations, church groups, and universities engaged in a global dialog. There was no sudden revelation. There was no single vote or moment of transfiguration. NGOs did not suddenly embrace military organizations. Volunteers did not buy stock in for-profit organizations. During constant discussions, trial and error decisions, and a series of conferences and meetings; policy makers came to appreciate the problems of the lonely and austere life of the mine clearer as operators. They also came to understand that manual clearance alone would not reclaim the areas needed by millions of displaced and scared civilians. The slow and steady realization sunk in, that this massive problem needed to be faced by everyone. Exclusive policies, strategies, and even technologies would not suffice.

Suddenly, operators, sharing experiences, agreed that dogs *can* be of immense use, if used in a correct and complementary way. Managers are now understanding that paramedics can become useful adjuncts to their teams. A country-wide Level-One survey can really foster successful demining planning and implementation schedules. Mine awareness counselors are helping and being supported by landmine victims. And on it goes - worldwide!

The change has been evolutionary. A Martian suddenly transported to Earth would have a difficult time understanding why such an organizational, technical, and tactical balance is so extraordinary among these groups and individuals. But those of us who have seen the conflicts, which have produced the current landmine crisis, know how revolutionary the change has been.

It is in this spirit that the current Journal has been written and edited. We believe that machines are not the sole answer to landmine clearance. In many cases they will not be applicable. But, mechanically-assisted mine clearance can support or lead in the removal of mines from large or critical areas. We know that many of our colleagues have rejected "big machines" in favor of "low-tech" methods. While there is much to be

said for low-tech and low-cost technologies, we, in the spirit of objectivity and open-mindedness, present a collection of articles, which we believe presents collectively a good analytical view of the use of "machines and demining."

Let us know what you think.