The Munitions Challenge in Albania

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Amid the explosions from condemning the Masayev the streets of Grozny. Associated Press Russian distant Ruslan clearing mines and aiding in humanitarian relief efforts to moving medical supplies between hospitals and military targets. If it moves they strike it with and maintaining generators for the civilians. Recently, operating in Chechnya. When the fighting got too severe for mine clearance work, HALO switched its efforts to moving medical supplies between hospitals and maintaining generators for the civilians. Recently, when the Russians bombarded a mine field that HALO had been clearing, three of HALO's staff were killed. "There are no distinctions between civilian and military targets. If it moves they strike it with aircraft, and if it does not move they shell it," says HALO director Guy Willoughby. Many feel that HALO was doing instrumental work in Chechnya, clearing mines and aiding in humanitarian relief efforts.

The Chechen civilians are caught in the middle of the fighting. Many want to leave through the "safe" corridors the Russians have provided. They can't trust the roadways. There are numerous stories of the Russian soldiers demanding bribes and looting belongings at checkpoints. "To the north are Russian guns, in the south villages are being hit. They are afraid of becoming targets on both sides of this war," says Willoughby.

Landmine casualties and victim assistance data is not reliable. Estimates from the previous war site 800 casualties in 1996, half of which were children. 10 percent of children suffer from acute posttraumatic stress disorders as a result of landmine accidents. Victim assistance was nearly impossible prior to the current fighting. The health care system in Chechnya was inadequate before the war because of severe shortages of equipment, medicine and water. If medical care is available, the victim must pay for any prosthesis and crutches.

Social and economic problems were and will continue to be staggering. Lack of financial support from other countries, information blockades and the absence of humanitarian relief are all devastating to this tiny mountain country. Only a peace settlement and mutual cooperation will allow humanitarian organizations to safely begin the seemingly insurmountable task of rebuilding the lives of the Chechen people.

Currently, the situation for the Russian Rebels is dire. While multiple rocket launchers are still being fired at Grozny, the brunt of the fighting has now moved to the highlands, the last rebel stronghold. Russian forces have launched an intensive military attack in Alkhan-Kala village where their have been many rebel casualties to include prominent rebel commanders.

Western military forces have asserted that the attack on Alkhan-Kala was an ambush. The Chechens were lured there. The fighters were deliberately given a "corridor" to escape Grozny. This "corridor" was actually a mine field and several rebel leaders were killed when they entered it. The few dozen who successfully crossed and reached Alkhan-Kala found the Russians waiting for them.

At the beginning of the new millennium, Russia is once again faced with defining its future, as it did in the early 20th century. Former president Yeltsin, championed by the comments of leaders in the European Union and the United States over the aggressive assault on Chechnya, has made the comment, "They must have forgotten for a moment what Russia is. It has a full arsenal of nuclear weapons." This may be so, but there is also a rampant black market operating, severe food shortages, and republics in their federation breaking away from the motherland. While none will dispute the need for a country to remain strong, unified and prosperous, these are not the conditions of the current Russian Federation.

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Ammunitions Storage and Disposal Implementation Team

The latter function was undertaken in late 1998 by an eight-man military Ammunition Storage and Disposal Implementation Team (ASDIT) with members from the UK, United States, Denmark, Belgium and Italy. They carried out the training of Conventional Munitions Disposal (CMD) of 16 Albanian officers, the planning and conduct of UXO clearance tasks, EOD clearance planning, provision of ammunition storage and management training for 14 officers. They also began training for the initial Ammunition Storage Area (ASA) safety, operational assessments, improved chemical analysis training and gave advice to Albanian laboratory personnel.

EOD and Ammunition Storage Training Team (EOD and ASTT)

The mission was successful, which provided the AAF with the basic skills necessary to conduct operational tasks confidently. This mission also concluded that further assistance was necessary to assist in the establishment of a full concept of operations, signal NATO's commitment to capacity building and to maintain momentum in resolving the problem. The NATO Political Military Steering Committee (PMSC) authorized the deployment of a second mission, the EOD and Ammunition Storage Training Team (EODASTT) in early 1999.

The mission was unique in many ways because a decision was taken to contract out the technical nucleus of the team to a commercial company by way of competitive tender. Mine Clear International, a UK-based company specializing in EOD operations, was selected and provided a team of two British and two Canadian, former military Ammunition Technical Officers (ATO). The team was completed by serving military staff from Italy, the United States and Denmark. Initially envisaged as a three-month mission, its success and immediate impact persuaded the
EODASST Mission

Assembled from Jan. 12 to Feb. 1, 1999, the second NATO mission's primary objective was "to provide expert EOD and Ammunition Storage planning, assistance, training and advice to the Albanian Ministry of Defense in order that the AAF can plan and safely conduct EOD operations at Unexposed Ordinance (UXO) contaminated sites. Logistic Ammunition Disposal operations and the rationalization and establishment of safe ammunition storage." The mission goals for Explosive Ordnance Disposal was to assist the Ministry of Defense in forming an EOD organization, help in the production of all procedures for the organization, assist in the planning of Hot Spot clearance, validating ammunition disposal training, and procedures compliance are also a priority. Preparation of a strategy plan in conjunction with the Ministry of Defense was essential for ammunition management as well as advising on the establishment of Ammunition Storage Areas (ASAs) to reflect NATO standards and norms. Assisting in identification, establishment, validation of Logistic Disposal Operations (LDO), advice of demobilization grounds for LDO, and providing technical support to a UK-funded demilitarization feasibility study was critical to success.

Explosive Ordnance Disposal

This element of the mission, which is considered to be the most important by the Albanians, progressed smoothly. As of Dec. 15, 1999, many goals had been met such as, the establishment of the AAF EOD organization management team, the provision of sufficient EOD equipment donated by NATO member-countries to equip current EOD teams, the introduction of donated EOD equipment into service and training in use and deployment. All of these goals were achieved as well as several more that followed. More influential ones were the recognition of all 16 Hot Spots as well as the operation orders and associated planning documentation was prepared for each individual Hot Spot. The Hot Spot at Paliqekesi was totally cleared of UXO and clearance of a second Hot Spot at Mbretan was commenced. All the low-level individual and collective training was completed and the commencement of CME instructors training began for all AAF personnel.

The program was disrupted by the Kosovo crisis as AAF EOD resources, supported by EODASST technical input, were re-tasked to deal with the Serbian cross-border KB-1 sub-munitions, conventional artillery and mortar strikes in border areas. Other areas that needed attention were the stray NATO air-delivered weapons, the surveying and marking of 30-year-old. It was also determined that as much as 90 percent of the stockpile will require disposal within the next 10 years, which is clearly a major challenge for the AAF. The key ammunition requiring logistical disposal is unexpended ammunition in poor condition (800s tons) as well as stock-declared unserviceable by the AAF weighing up to as much as 3,000 tons. Another factor needed to be disposed of are the AP and AT mines as part of the Ottawa Treaty obligations (5,000 tons). Although progress in the explosive ordnance area is vital, real time activity has been exceptional. There is clearly a need for further support in the continued validation of EOD activity, in particular Hot Spot Clearance Procedures. The team has determined that some information has been lost in the translation and interpretation process. The training for further EOD operators will enable the Albanians to enhance current disposal operations, address the ongoing requirements to store EOD equipment, and to develop and implement a process to identify, select and train Albanian personnel as EOD trainers.

Future Task Areas

Other areas of EOD and ammunition management that require support are cataloging a system which would be a NATO standard system for all ammunition needs, but Albania does not currently possess a credible counter-IEDD capability. An extension to the capability of the AAF EOD organization would be considered a logical enhancement. The ammunition stockpile requires a 100 percent surveillance program to ascertain serviceability. The AAF will require further training in this function. A number of bad handling and storage practices which are intrinsically unsafe have been identified and an initial course held in December 1999 will be supplemented by a depot-by-depot program of active risk limitation measures.

Conclusions

Both the EODASST and UNDP Weapons Collections missions have proved extremely successful on a number of levels. In Albania they are seen as both a practical and symbolic indicator that the country is stabilizing and addressing fundamental security and safety issues. NATO has seen a vindication of its concept of the Individual Partnership Program within PIP believing success in such a technically complex area bodes well for addressing other specialist areas with confidence. NATO has also seen its first steps towards contracting military advisory tasks to prove successful with the hope that such future tasks will not be forced to rely on the allocation of scarce military resources from member nations. The UNDP approach has vindicated the view that the collective responsibility and ownership engendered through this weapons collection program is the way forward, and hopes to replicate the approach in Albania and elsewhere.

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