

Islamic Republic of Iran

Updated Wednesday, 18-Sep-2013 10:43:37 EDT

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History

The landmine problem in Iran is a result of the 1980–1988 Iran-Iraq war, when the Saddam Hussein regime was in conflict with Iran. It is estimated that during the war, over 16 million landmines were emplaced, covering almost 10 million acres. The contaminated areas are in five provinces: Khuzestan, Ilam, Kermanshah, Kurdistan and West Azarbaijan. In the past 15 years, 694,800 square miles of land have been cleared, with 926,400 square miles of land left to be cleared.¹

Iran has not signed the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention² and has abstained from voting on every annual U.N. General Assembly resolution banning mines since 1997.³ "The government of Iran is against the use of landmines, but war in and occupation of two countries bordering Iran—Iraq and Afghanistan—are not conducive to Iran joining the Mine Ban Treaty,"³ says Hossein Viziri, director of the Islamic Republic of Iran Mine Action Center.



The Landmine Problem

The minefields along the borders of Iraq block access to agricultural land, infrastructure and social services. Refugees, nomads and small communities reside at the borders, placing them at risk from mines and unexploded ordnance; herders are particularly threatened because their lives revolve around finding grazing land for animals. Children are also especially at risk because their natural curiosity and urge to play often place them in the dangerous path of landmines. Many refugees from the first Gulf War (1991) and many Iranian Shiites have attempted to cross the mined borders to return home or to visit religious sites in Iraq. These attempts often result in landmine casualties.

Over the last 15 years, it is estimated that 4,000 people have been killed and 6,000 injured from landmines in Iran.⁴ The Iranian government has requested maps and information from Iraq, but so far this information has not been provided. It is likely that no maps of the minefields laid during the war exist; consequently, deminers do not know exactly where to look.

Mine Action

National Mine Action Council. The government recently mandated the formation of NMAC, which operates under the Ministry of Defense. The responsibility of the Council is to formulate policies, coordinate activities, and draft operational protocols for use by demining units, as well as to mobilize resources and procure mine action-related equipment. NMAC created the National Centre for Mine Action in Iran to execute all operations in collaboration with other national and international stakeholders.

Islamic Republic of Iran Mine Action Center. IRMAC is responsible for all demining operations in Iran. All organizations involved in demining must cooperate and collaborate with IRMAC. The goals of the organization are to "be mine safe fast and to support people who were injured by mines and UXO and increase education and awareness about mines."¹ IRMAC focuses on increasing its capacity to address the landmine problem by supporting other organizations involved in the cause.

IRMAC supports five regional offices (one in each contaminated province), army demining units, private demining companies and national non-governmental organizations. Part of the support for these NGOs is producing demining equipment, such as mechanical vehicles Taftan I and II, anti-mine clothing and anti-mine boots. The organization also has specific departments involved in supervising demining operations, organizing mine risk education and victim assistance, and developing standards and research.

United Nations Development Programme. In 2002, the UNDP launched a joint initiative with the Iranian Ministry of Interior, which called for \$470,000 (U.S.) to assist the government in developing the capacity for planning, coordinating and implementing mine action activities. The initiative also provided training for mine action middle managers responsible for surveying mined areas, alerting communities about the dangers of mines, ensuring treatment and rehabilitation for survivors of mine accidents, and overseeing the detection and destruction of mines. "Considering the high volume of contaminated land in Iran, which makes [it] the second most contaminated country in the world, the [low level of] international budget and support for Iran is not justified," Vaziri says.

Survivor Assistance and Disability Policy

Military personnel injured by mines receive medical care, rehabilitation, prostheses and a pension from the army. Civilians injured by mines are referred to the relevant governor general department, which then assigns them to a public or private department. All mine victims and families of those killed are entitled to monetary support from the government once the incident has been registered and confirmed.

IRMAC works with organizations like the Trauma Care Foundation and the Iranian Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies to provide victim assistance and mine risk education. Committees have been established in all five provinces that produce people to support assistance, such as different types of prostheses. In the area of MRE, posters and presentations about awareness and hazards have been developed. Films and animation are currently being developed, as well as contracts with national TV stations and national communication networks to increase the media through which education is distributed.

Creating a Mine-Safe Iran

According to Vaziri, creating a mine-safe Iran depends on the budget organizations have available. The IRMAC budget is currently provided by the government. Vaziri emphasizes the need to have donor support for demining technology, equipment and facilities, more mine risk education, and a worldwide awareness of the situation in Iran. "A 10-year plan has been prepared but the implementation of the plan depends upon the allocation of funds by the government and international donors," he says.

Endnotes

1. Personal Interview. Hossein Vaziri. Islamic Republic of Iran Mine Action Center. Oct. 12, 2005.
2. *Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction*. Ottawa, Canada. Sept. 18, 1997. http://www.un.org/Depts/mine/UNDocs/ban_trty.htm. Accessed Nov. 16, 2005
3. "Iran." *Landmine Monitor Report* 2004. <http://www.icbl.org/lm/2004/iran.html>. Viewed Sept. 19, 2005.
4. "Iran (Islamic Republic of)." E-Mine: Electronic Mine Information Network. November 2005. <http://www.mineaction.org/country.asp?c=95>. Viewed Sept. 19, 2005.

References

1. "UNDP in Islamic Republic of Iran." United Nations Development Programme. July 2002. <http://www.undp.org.ir/news-desc.asp?NewsID=19>. Viewed Sept. 21, 2005.
2. Personal Interview. Majid Fahimy. Islamic Republic of Iran Mine Action Center. Oct. 12, 2005.

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