

Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction

Volume 5
Issue 1 *The Journal of Mine Action*

Article 28

April 2001

Afghanistan

Country Profile
CISR

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Recommended Citation

Profile, Country (2001) "Afghanistan," *Journal of Mine Action* : Vol. 5 : Iss. 1 , Article 28.
Available at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol5/iss1/28>

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PROFILES

AFGHANISTAN



HISTORY

Afghanistan is predominantly an Islamic country that gained full independence from British rule in 1919 after centuries of dispute. Since that time, it has changed from a monarchy to a republic, leading up to a Soviet-supported coup in 1979 that caused over 5 million Afghans to flee the country. The United States funded rebel groups in the 1980s in an attempt to force Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, which finally occurred in 1989. However, continuing conflicts throughout the 1990s caused millions of Afghans to remain in countries like Pakistan and Iran, while the landmine situation was further exacerbated.

LANDMINES/UXO OVERVIEW

While 465 square km of land have been cleared of mines and UXO since 1993, about 717 sq. km of Afghanistan remains contaminated. Of this total, 337

sq. km are considered high priority. The breakdown of the affected areas is as follows: 61 percent grazing land, 26 percent agricultural land, 7 percent roads, 4 percent residential areas and 1 percent irrigation systems. This breakdown, which includes many heavily trafficked areas, has partly caused the expatriation of thousands of Afghans. In 1999, 72,098 people were relocated following demining efforts.

CASUALTIES

The rate of casualties in Afghanistan has been steadily decreasing in recent years. An average of five to 10 people were killed or injured by landmines daily in 1999, compared to about 10 to 12 people in 1998 and 20 to 24 in 1993. From January 1999 to January 2000, the Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA) reported 1,771 casualties, with an average of 136 mine casualties oc-

curing per month. Still, many casualties go unreported. Overall, MAPA has reported over 400,000 casualties since 1991.

DEMING

From 1990 to April 2000, 205,842 AP mines, 9,199 AT mines and 1,054,738 UXO were cleared from Afghani fields, roads and residential areas. The Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief (ACBAR) estimates that between governmental organizations and NGOs there are about 5,000 mine action workers implementing mine action programs in the country.

REALITY CHECK

Due to years of stifling conflict, Afghanistan finds itself lagging behind much of the world in terms of literacy rates, educational facilities and urban development. These deficiencies increase the need for mine awareness education for the general population. In 1999 alone, 979,640 people received mine awareness education—a sign of progression, although mine awareness organizations clearly still have their work cut out for them.

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