

Mine Action— A Model for Other Global Challenges?

by Dennis Barlow, Director, Mine Action Information Center

A FEW SHORT YEARS AGO the humanitarian demining task seemed insurmountable. Not only was the prospect of eliminating landmines as a global threat deemed unachievable, but the political and organizational landscape was new, diverse and uncharted.

A Brave New, and Complicated, World

Humanitarian demining, if not a new phenomena, was new to a global community which had only just shed its Cold War cloak and was trying to cope with emerging regional threats to stability, independence movements, civil warfare, refugee surges, factional antagonisms and border challenges. The organizations involved in demining were as varied as the kinds of landmines and UXO, which dotted the landscapes of some 60 threatened countries. Newly formed, but highly motivated and effective NGOs such as Halo Trust, Norwegian People's Aid, and the Mines Actions Group (MAG) were soon joined by other NGOs, for-profit corporations, international organizations, military task forces, donor nations and concerned individuals.

The problem was that such diverse organizations, performing a plethora of what we now call mine action functions, were engaged all over the world in an uncoordinated and sometimes dysfunctional process. Everybody wanted to do well, but there was no coordinating mechanism to maximize, integrate, record, implement and evaluate overall plans and operations. Even worse, the modus operandi of these various organizations rarely brought them into contact with congruent organizations. Whatever cooperative global, regional, or concerted efforts were devised had to be engineered with little precedent and even less authority.



Dennis Barlow

The Success of the Humanitarian Demining Model

What has happened in the past five years has been just short of a political miracle. Out of the chaos of many individual organizations just trying to "do good" has emerged a community of humanitarian mine action activists and operators which has collectively, professionally, and quietly created what may be a model for other international efforts.

The newly assigned Director of the U.N. Mine Action Service (UNMAS), Martin Barber, observed this new state of affairs in his address to the Fourth International Meeting of Mine Action Directors in Geneva on Feb. 5, 2001. Having the perspective of one "returning to the vineyard," he remarked upon the extraordinary cooperation of many groups and the seamless nature of operations as a matter of course in mine action today.

I must admit to some shock at hearing that observation, and yet it took me only a few moments' reflection to realize that he was absolutely correct. Having been involved in this issue from 1994, I—like many others immersed in the challenges and everyday stickiness of demining issues—had failed to appreciate the great organizational, operational, management, and informational strides which have characterized this great cause in the recent past. It is worth the time to catalog some of the great, but perhaps unnoticed trends, which have emerged and become part of this process.

10 Innovative Approaches to Mine Action

Conferences and Workshops. The acceptance of a new challenge dictated that a series of conferences, seminars, and workshops, needed to be held to both frame the challenges of demining and to get to know the players. As a result of an aggressive schedule of such meetings, many partnerships, alliances, dialogs, concerns and plans for action have resulted. These

gatherings have targeted various demining groups, functions and issues, and have become "real-time" clearinghouses for ideas and "next steps" and have often framed such hot demining topics as the use of mine detecting dogs, geographical systems requirements, donor concerns, standards, management questions, etc. It is this kind of forum, which has fostered the trust and camaraderie, that has become a hallmark of the mine action community.

U.N. Leadership. Several U.N. agencies, such as UNDP, UNOPS, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNDPKO and WHO, have an abiding interest in mine action. Over the past several years these organizations, working with the U.N. agency specifically charged with the comprehensive oversight of mine action—UNMAS—have coordinated their efforts and facilitated a structured and organized U.N. approach to meeting the entire scope of landmine-related challenges.

Advocacy Groups. While the "anti-personnel landmine ban" organizations are often recognized for their devotion to advocacy, they have also been very active in supporting humanitarian demining, mine awareness and victim assistance projects. Besides performing groundbreaking survey and database work, the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, through the publication of its monumental *Landmine Monitor Report*, has produced an invaluable resource relied upon by the entire mine action community.

R&D. One of the most frustrating aspects of mine clearance is the lack of what has been called the "silver bullet" solution to the problem. Perhaps a greater challenge is that the market and procurement path for technologies designed for humanitarian applications are murky. Despite the difficulties, however, many donor nations have developed creative approaches to the problem. As a result, new demining technologies are continually being developed. Of special note is the effort to unify much of the work be-

ing done around the world under the rubric of the International Test and Evaluation Program (ITEP). The ITEP approach promises to be an effective way to avoid R&D duplication and point the way to an impartial and effective evaluation process.

Coordination and Information Services. The new millennium is already characterized by a realization of the importance in the processing and management of reliable information. Whether geo-spatial, narrative, or quantitative, the identification and use of information is one of the keys to carrying out effective mine action programs. The creation of the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) was Switzerland's contribution to this critical outreach effort. The GICHD has become a chief clearinghouse for studies, committee meetings, and developing methods for implementing U.N.-directed standards and electronic information processes. James Madison University was asked by the U.S. Department of Defense to supplement the GICHD outreach with conference, web page and journal activities. Perhaps the most effective real-time and informal communications network has been the always interesting and relevant chat room managed by Menschen Gegen Minen (MgM), an NGO.

Civil-Military Cooperation. The role of militaries in supporting mine action has for some time been controversial. Nevertheless, many nations—both those providing assistance and those afflicted with landmines—have re-configured and trained various elements within their militaries to accept this mission. A recent conference of militaries providing these services has revealed improved coordination efforts with NGOs, host-nations, recipients and other organizations. Military humanitarian assistance roles are not essentially in the mine clearing areas, but in providing technical advice and training, mine awareness support, victim assistance, research and development venues, and the procurement of equipment and supplies.

Surveys. In determining the kinds of mine action required, as well as to arrive at a meaningful prioritization and development plan, it is critical that an appropriate survey be conducted. However, there are many surveys and methodologies to measure. The humanitarian demining community has developed a number of excellent instruments to measure various relevant data on suspected landmine-contaminated areas and the resulting socioeconomic impact. These surveys have yielded invaluable data, which can suggest the proper scope of a campaign and greatly increase the efficiency of an operation. The impact surveys now being conducted by the Survey Action Center (under the control and guidance of the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation and UNMAS, respectively) are producing just such data.

Public-Private Partnerships. A novel concept for maximizing public participation and support of humanitarian demining activities has been the identification of private or educational organizations to participate actively in the process. This approach has the benefit of allowing private donors to get more directly involved. It increases the number of people who gain a realistic and "up-close" perspective into the nature of the effort, while, at the same time, raising much-needed funds and increasing the range of activities countenanced within mine action. Both the Adopt-A-Minefield project and the Superman and Supergirl comic books are examples of U.S. efforts to invigorate the demining process through the active participation and support of private organizations.

National Input. The demining issue confronts many nations in many ways. Some nations are donor countries; within this group donations can consist of funds, human resources, training, equipment, or logistical support. Afflicted nations have varying needs: money, training, organizational and management skills, etc. The mix and match of requirements and resources and the interplay of the application of those resources is a very tricky game. Many of the nations involved use some of the processes noted above as ways to get involved. However, there are other mechanisms. Twenty-three donor countries have formed a sounding-board group called the Mine Action Support Group (MASG), which frequently

reviews the state of play in the mine action arena and recommends policy guidance. Signatories to the Ottawa Treaty meet semi-annually under the auspices of UNMAS and the GICHD in Geneva to stay abreast of current trends and suggest various plans of action. The bottom line is that virtually no nation goes without the opportunity to gain access or input into the various groups within the demining community.

Academia. At an important demining conference held in Helsingor, Denmark, in 1996, it was noted that universities had much to contribute, but were silent in their application to the landmine issue. Today, many universities are key players in the mine action community: Cranfield University in England is conducting a highly successful mine action manager's course; JMU acts as a major mine landmine information hub; and the University of Western Australia has become a leader in the development of low-tech, but highly effective protective gear for deminers. A whole host of schools are now involved in clearance R&D, while others are offering courses directly related to landmine challenges.

It is interesting to note that these approaches to meeting the unique challenges posed by the landmine threat have been accomplished in a very quiet and unobtrusive way. Very little in the foregoing list smacks of authority or command. Instead, they point to a voluntary and flexible way of organizing various capabilities into a plan that uses each application for the good of the whole. In many instances, roles have been defined by trial and error, or by default. There is no claim here that each of these efforts is proceeding without friction or even efficiently.

Still, it is amazing that such a wonderful quilt could have been made out of so many different fabrics, with so many designs. One cannot help but wonder if the same kind of coordinating mechanisms are possible (desirable?) in other international endeavors.

[Note: The Director does not claim that the above processes comprise a complete list. He invites readers to add to this list of mine action processes to make a more comprehensive reporting of this "model" sometime in the near future.]