April 2002

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Recommended Citation
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The Mine Action Program in Afghanistan

The United Nations Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA) combines the efforts of numerous Mine Action Centers (MACs) and Local NGOs in order to form one of the most comprehensive mine action programs in the world. Operating under the direction of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA), MAPA has successfully located and destroyed 1,629,605 landmines/UOX and cleared 230,440,706 square meters of mined area and 339,579,010 square meters of battlefield area.

by Susanna Sprinkel, MAIC

Introduction

Years of controversy have left Afghanistan as the country most severely affected by landmines, with an estimated 150 to 300 landmine/UOX-related fatalities each month. These injuries add an unnecessary burden to the lives of many who already suffer on a daily basis from numerous other hardships. As a result, Afghanistan has become one of the strongest Mine Action Programs in the world. The Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA) was developed in 1999 and has been working under supervision of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UNOCHA) ever since.

This program combines the efforts of six Mine Action Centers (MACs)—the UN Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (MACA) and five Regional Mine Action Centers (RMACs) designated in the central, southern, northern, eastern and western regions of Afghanistan—as well as 15 local NGOs in order to provide extensive coverage of all areas of mine action (for more information on partner NGOs, see Table 1 below). UNOCHA, United Nations Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) are responsible for developing the structure of MAPA, and they have designated specific responsibilities to each of the bodies involved.

Coordination of Mine Action Activities

Designated Responsibilities

UNOCHA, UNDP and UNMAS have requested that all mine action activities be planned and coordinated by MACA and the Mine Clearance and Planning Agency (MCIPA). Specifically, these bodies are responsible for the following operations:

- Planning all mine action strategies and operations
- Developing a set of mine action standards and policies
- Overseeing MAPA activities and assuring quality
- Implementing necessary programs and support for field operations
- Securing and distributing required resources for all mine action programs
- Organizing mine action technology
- Managing and distributing mine-related information

Goals for 2002

As outlined in their 2002 Project Plan (available at www.mineaction.org), the United Nations has established the following goals for coordination activities:
Survey Operations

**Described Responsibilities**

The United Nations anticipated all survey operations in Afghanistan to MACA, MCPA, the Mine Dog Center (MDC), Halo Trust and the Danish Demining Group (DDG). These organizations are responsible for identifying, marking and mapping all hazardous areas as well as distributing data regarding these territories. Specifically, these bodies should complete the following objectives:

- Reducing the amount of territory to be surveyed by pinpointing and clearly marking hazardous areas.
- Performing a Post-Conflict Contamination Assessment in conjunction with the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation (VFW) in order to determine the extent of the landmine threat resulting from air strikes and recent conflicts.
- Conducting a Landmine Impact Survey (LIS) in conjunction with the Survey Working Group.
- Gathering and distributing information on the technical and socio-economic impact of contaminated regions in order to set priorities for clearance, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and mine awareness operations.
- Evaluating and distributing information gathered through the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSSA) and contributing accurate and up-to-date data on the landmine situation. Specifically, these bodies should compile the landmine/UXO threat in their region and allocate improved data with humanitarian assistance and development aid personnel.

**Goals for 2002**

In 2002, the United Nations anticipated the following accomplishments for Survey Operations in Afghanistan:

- Marking 50 square km of mine fields and 50 square km of battle area as well as surveying and reducing 200 square km of potentially contaminated areas
- Identifying mine-free land for agricultural development, irrigation, grazing and other productive use by Afghan citizens returning to their native lands.
- Verifying and repositioning banned free trade routes in order to increase mobility both socially and economically.
- Reducing fatalities and relieving the patient load on the medical and health care system by clearly marking hazardous areas and establishing effective awareness programs in affected areas as well as discouraging refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) from entering hazardous areas.
- Helping other mine action operations concentrate on high priority territories, thus accelerating the capabilities of MACA for planning strategies and effectively managing budgets.
- Making mine-related data easier to access, thus permitting more effective preparations.

**Landmine and UXO Clearance Activities**

**Described Responsibilities**

All landmine and UXO clearance activities have been conducted by the Agency for Rehabilitation and Energy Conservation in Afghanistan (AREA), Afghan Technical Consultants (ATC), the Demining Agency for Afghanistan (DAFA), DDG, Halo Trust, MDC, Handicap International (HI) and the Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation (OMAR). In order to eliminate the landmine threat in Afghan territory and return the land to productive use, these NGOs have been designated the following tasks:

- Restoring capabilities of MACA activities that were hindered as a result of the September 11th conflict.
- Helping other organizations to install advanced mine clearance equipment by clearing access roads and land for civilians.
- Clearing high-priority territories and marking low-priority zones.
- Assisting bodies conducting security evaluations and performing emergency assistance in the country.
- Performing EOD and emergency clearance operations.
- Retraining all personnel and fully restoring all mine action resources throughout Afghanistan.
- Helping other mine action operations concentrate on high priority territories, thus accelerating the capabilities of MACA for planning strategies and effectively managing the budget.
- Making mine-related data easier to access, thus permitting more effective preparations.

**Goals for 2002**

The United Nations are asking clearance teams to aim for the following objectives:

- Clearing at least 35 square km of high priority mine fields and 60 km² of high-priority UXO contaminated battlefields.
- Clearing all cluster bombs dropped as a result of the September 11th conflict.
- Marking at least 30 km² of mine fields and 50 km² of battlefields.
- Formulating a stockpile destruction strategy and destroying all stockpiles as a result.
- Supplying clearing teams for territory management, irrigation, grazing and other productive use.
- Clearing major trade routes in order to increase mobility both socially and economically.
- Opening and increasing access to settlement areas in order to migrate refugees and IDPs back into their native lands.
- Reducing fatalities in the territory, thus relieving the patient load in medical and health care systems by eliminating the landmine threat.
- Advancing reconstructive activities in the country by providing a safe environment for relief and recovery personnel.
- Building a strong foundation for contributing organizations to conduct clearance operations on low priority areas without UN assistance.

In addition to these goals for 2002, MAPA, HALO Trust and DDG hope to expand their clearance teams as shown in Table 2.

**Quality Assurance**

**Described Responsibilities**

In order to assure that MACA activities are conducted safely, efficiently and cost-effectively, the United Nations has appointed the Monitoring, Evaluation and Training Agency (META) to perform Quality Assurance (QA) of all mine action operations. The procedures of this program include:

- Observing all mine action NGOs to make sure they are following all national and International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) in their operations.
- Continuously researching and acquiring new methods to implement the safest and most effective programs.
- Examining the cause of all demolitions fatalities, in order to develop improved techniques.
- Training all mine action personnel and developing efficient training programs, including refresher training courses in order to maintain and improve skills for locating and destroying newly laid antitank devices.
- Planning and executing training for basic management and leadership positions on supervising, planning and conducting training tasks and organizing senior management and middle management courses on overseeing and formulating mine action programs.
- Developing training programs for mine awareness programs geared towards specific regions.
- Designing and distributing supplemental materials for reference, assistance or additional training.
- Forming a national standards guideline based on IMAS.
- Investigating the use of new mine action technologies in Afghan regions.

**Goals for 2002**

By the end of 2002, the United Nations hopes to improve QA in the following areas:

- Improving the safety and effectiveness of all MAPA operations.
- Preparing EOD teams to handle cluster bombs and other newly dropped munitions, by implementing 17 Battle Area Clearance Courses (BAC).
- Performing refresher training in all areas of mine action and creating and distributing technical and training manuals to MAPA employees.
- Observing 252 mechanical and mine clearance, BAC, EOD, mine dog and survey team operations.
- Completing three Middle Management training courses integrating information on operating mine action organizations.
- Forming and Implementing a Mine Risk Education (MRE) training and assessment program.

**Mine Awareness**

**Described Responsibilities**

In order to reduce the number of landmine and UXO-related accidents in Afghanistan, the United Nations has assigned the following NGOs the responsibility and coordinating mine awareness initiatives: ARL, Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS), AREA, British Broadcasting Corporation/AFghan Education Program (BBQ/AFAP), UNICEF, HALO Trust, HI, META, OMAR and Save the Children (SC-USA).

The MACA Mine Awareness program intends not only to increase awareness throughout the country but also to build relations with institutional and governmental authorities. Specifically, these bodies have implemented the following responsibilities:

- Incorporating a wide range of Mine Awareness activities into mine action and other humanitarian assistance programs both globally and locally.
- Increasing the data collected and evaluated in order to further advance mine awareness programs.
- Examining MRE tactics and expanding the curriculum.
- Developing and implementing standards and establishing a set of guidelines for assessing training methods.
- Further building a collection and analysis of information on mine casualties.
- Formulating a plan for targeting specific groups by examining established training and educational materials.
- Designing training kits for teachers.
National Mine Action Programs

Introduction

I recently received an e-mail with a real good heart on it, so I would like to talk about sticking my neck in the music once more. The questions included:

• Will technology ever improve speed and safety in Humanitarian Demining (HD)?
• What is the comparative efficiency among commercial, military and NGO clearance?
• Will dogs be more or less important into HD programs?
• When will land use priorities determine clearance priorities?
• Is “donor fatigue” a reality? If so, how do we fix it?

These questions are right in the middle of my current pet struggle to give technology its rightful role and place in mine clearance. I would like to discuss both technology in (HD) and donor fatigue, because technology is linked to funding. Present HD methods are too slow and ineffective at solving the total problem, so the donors do not get the value for their money.

I want to present this article simply as a South African who has been involved in HD on one hand and associated with research and development (R&D) on the other. By 1996, as one in the South African government-owned demining group, I was already doing a presentation slide that read:

A Technologist’s Nightmare: You build the SILVER BULLET and nobody wants to use it.

Little did I realize then that this nightmare would turn out to be the truth for technology in general and not only for one individual in particular. The fact is that new technologies and products are being blown out of the game before they have been given a fair chance to develop into their full potential. Initially I blamed the people controlling the demining as being responsible. Now I realize that people developing the technologies are at least equally responsible. Too many are simply doing their R&D for R&D’s sake or for financial gains with too little drive to get the product field-ready for deminers to use. This act in turn is upticking the deminers in the field, justifying their attitude that the research monies should be used directly for demining.

Will Technology Ever Improve Speed and Safety?

The simple answer is YES. In fact, for us as a demining group, it already has. For example, in 1991–92 we cleared 12,000 mines from around 62 pylons on the Maputo–South African border power line in Mozambique. We completed the job with two Campmine resistive vehicles (MRVs) fitted with various demining accessories: two armoured bulldozers; and a denaturing fuel-air gas mixture in one-meter diameter plastic-film tubes to work in spots the machines could not get to, such as amongst the pylons bottom and stays.

Mine Action often does not effectively use the technology available. The author gives several examples of beneficial uses of technology in the field, and offers suggestions to improve the effectiveness of several aspects of Mine Action.

by Vernon Joynt, Technical and Scientific Consultant to the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), South Africa

Conclusion

Through extensive planning and operations, MAPA hopes to ease human suffering through various mine clearance, Mine Awareness and other activities. In addition, they aim to help refugees and IDPs re-establish their lives in Afghanistan, by clearing areas for settlement and making them aware of the mine hazards in each region. They also intend to secure a food supply for civilians, by clearing agricultural and grazing land and making them available for productive use. By clearing land, buildings and major roadways in the country, MAPA can also help other organizations safely implement relief, development and rehabilitation programs for the Afghan people. Finally, MAPA has helped build Afghanistan’s economy, by providing work for more than 4,000 Afghan people, and they will continue to provide further employment opportunities in the future.

Since its development in 1989 and up until April 2001, MAPA’s mine action personnel have cleared 330,445,706 sq m of mined area and 339,579,010 sq m of battlefied area. Approximately 728 sq km remains to be cleared, with 350 sq km marked high priority (for more information see Figure 1). Additionally, MAPA’s survey teams have surveyed over 302,960,491 sq m of mined area and 364,588,980 sq m of battlefied area. Overall, MAPA personnel have successfully located and destroyed 1,629,665 munitions, including 10,127 AT mines, 219,730 AP mines and 1,399,748 pieces of UXO. After the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks, all mine action programs were severely hindered as a result of security conditions in Afghanistan, so they were unable to reach their goals for 2001. However, at least 90 percent of mine action personnel have returned to the country, prepared to respond to new conditions and munitions, as of January 2002.

For more information on the current mine action situation in response to September 11th terrorist attacks see Update on Current Mine Action Situation in Afghanistan on page 99.

All colors and maps courtesy of UNMAS.

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Published by JMU Scholarly Commons, 2002