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The United States Central Command's Role in the Middle East

The U.S. CENTCOM humanitarian mine action program provides a successful interaction between U.S. military trainers, the host country, the indigenous community and Non-Governmental Organizations while ridding the host country of landmines. Their train-the-trainer approach insures that there is an indigenous demining operation in place before U.S. forces exit the country.



by Margaret S. Busé, Editor

There are 25 countries in the United States Central Command (CENTCOM) area of responsibility. Fourteen of these countries are considered mine affected. CENTCOM has demining programs in Egypt, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritea, Jordan, Yemen and Oman. The distance between CENTCOM headquarters at MacDill AFB in Tampa, Florida and the countries in their region poses a challenge in the development and management of training programs. Long-range planning through comprehensive demining plans outlining the Department of Defense (DOD) and host nation requirements is one of the significant ways CENTCOM successfully manages its programs.

The Mission

The process for a country initiating a demining program is straightforward. For military demining assistance, there needs to be

coordination between multiple players such as the Department of State, Department of Defense, Country teams, U.S. military trainers host nations and component commands.

A country-training program is managed using a 24-month time line, though a comand representative said that they have "cut down the time frame quite a bit." The process starts when a host nation formally requests assistance through the U.S Embassy. The formal request goes to the State Department and is reviewed by the US Government Interagency Subgroup for Humanitarian Mine Action to ensure the requesting country:

- Has a stable government currently in place.
- Is not currently planting landmines or has insurgent groups who are using them.
- Is capable of sustaining the program once properly trained.

The mission of all the regional commands is to conduct humanitarian demining training operations within the area of responsibility. This is carried out by executing Department of Defense demining programs in the host country, coordinating the U.S. participation and conducting assessments for humanitarian programs and mine action technologies. The mission of the regional commands' demining programs links directly to the U.S. national security strategy of promoting prosperity in the

host nation, enhancing security and stability and promoting democracy.

The Program

The train-the-trainer programs, which are tailored to the specific needs of the host nation, have been successful for CENTCOM and the host nations. This success is based upon the host nation taking "ownership" of the demining operation. "They know this is a program that they will have to sustain. They need an infrastructure that will be able to maintain the program. We are not infinite and we can't promise to be. We are there to help them set up an indigenous program with the goal of becoming a mine safe nation," states Peggie Murray, CENTCOM Humanitarian Assistance / Demining Branch Chief.

CENTCOM also promotes the involvement of NGOs and private voluntary organizations to supplement their efforts and that provides a win-win situation for all involved. Tim Kennedy of CENTCOM mentions a recent effort saying, "When we arrived in Egypt, we coordinated with the UNDP, several donor nations, and the US Country Team to prevent a duplication of effort in the area." Peggie Murray adds, "It is also important that the military works with the host country and donor organizations so that

programs are not left without completion when we leave. We also encourage the host nations to pursue donor money so that their mine action programs can be sustained." By involving the host nation and the available agencies in-country, CENTCOM provides a holistic approach to the demining efforts with an outstanding engagement opportunity for the U.S. Special Operations Forces who carry out humanitarian demining operations for the U.S.

While CENTCOM does not use a "one size fits all" plan to their demining operations, they approach mine action in four phases:

PHASE 1 SURVEY AND PLANNING

PHASE 2 INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT

PHASE 3 TRAINING

PHASE 4 SUSTAINMENT

The survey and planning phase includes assessment, Status of Forces

U.S. soldiers' availability for the operation is one of the humanitarian demining program's biggest challenges. "This is a great mission for Special Forces. They have the training and language skills and it gives us a chance to interact positively with another culture," states Dr. Al Childress.

The sustainment phase includes technical support team visits, providing re-training as necessary and encouraging donor support for continued success of the program. Since 1994, CENTCOM has trained approximately 530 trainers in seven countries to UN International standards and has donated over \$5 million (U.S.) of equipment. This is in addition to The Department of State donations.

Humanitarian assistance efforts throughout the CENTCOM Area of Operations can be expected to increase. "Our situation right now is we are getting ready to support the UN in humanitarian assistance. Our future

CENTCOM is encouraging countries to request U.S. humanitarian demining support. The humanitarian demining program is viewed as the one of the best opportunities to help people help themselves, develop long-term relationships, save life and limb and promote a mine-safe world. The humanitarian demining program is and will continue to be a primary tool for military-to-military and military-to-civilian engagement. ■

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"The program also fosters good will and trust among all the people involved. It gives the U.S. Military a chance to show through example-how we work and how we function. We are not there imposing democracy, but exposing it through our endeavors." Peggie Murray, CENTCOM Humanitarian Assistance Branch Chief

agreements and the allocation of resources. During infrastructure development, equipment is purchased, facilities renovated, U.S. Special Operations Forces (SOF) are trained, manpower requirements within the host nation are identified and all involved are prepared for demining training.

It is during the train-the-trainer phase that the training of the indigenous population is conducted by U.S. SOF

goals will not change. The majority of all efforts will be humanitarian. We will continue to respond to humanitarian situations regardless of September 11th. I don't expect the programs to end. The military has a valuable contribution to the demining world and I don't see that changing-it may increase. Throughout the government you will see a large increase in humanitarian efforts. You will see the military working side by side with nations," says Peggie Murray.