The U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program in Iraq

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Available at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol7/iss2/31

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FUND and eliminate the threat. The interna-
tional answer was fast and appropri-
ate, with a substantial economic pledge
and the professionalism of five major in-
ternational non-governmental organiza-
tions (NGOs). These specialized in hu-
manitarian clearance in general and, more
specifically, in the problem of CBUs.
Among these NGOs was the Internos
Mine Action Unit, a unique Italian NGO
that, besides a humanitarian relief project,
has conducted humanitarian mine and
UXO clearance as well as mine risk edu-
cation projects since 1997.
International actors spent two years
clearing CBUs from Kosovo. Nowadays,
the final work is carried out by the Kosovo
Protection Civil Agency, with local ex-
erts trained at the beginning by the in-
ternational technical experts of the
Internos Mine Action Unit and other in-
national NGOs.

CBUs in Other Countries

The threat of CBUs in the Balkans is
not only a problem in Kosovo. In the
Republic of Serbia, for example, UXO
remains everywhere—even in public gar-
dens—as the Internos Mine Action Unit's
experts pointed out in June 2001 after
an accurate assessment of the territory
to define the magnitude of the problem.
In Afghanistan, we found a ratio rate
as high as 50 percent in some case. It
is to be mentioned that, prior to the Coali-
tion Forces Military Campaign, battle
area clearance (BAC) operations in Af-
ghanistan were mainly conducted by sur-
face clearing. The widespread use of
CBUs during the air campaign and the
likelihood of cluster submunitions have
forced the Mine Action Centre for Af-
ghanistan (MACA) to adopt stricter Stan-
dard Operating Procedures (SOPs) simi-
lar to the ones adopted by the UN Mine
Action Centres in Kosovo and Herzegovina
(BIH), where the depth of clearance for
CBUs is set at 500 mm. Thus, it was neces-
sary to train BAC teams on the use of
the Schonstedt metal detector,
a new instrument specifically de-
signed for detecting ferrous materials
to a depth of 500 mm. Internos provided
approximately 60 Schonstedt detectors
to the Afghan NGO partner and trained
these BAC teams to use them properly and
efficiently.
The following are two main ex-
amples of CBU data collected:
1. Kabul Province, Karot Village: 363,580 sq m
inflected by mines (agri-
cultural and grazing ground). Dispens-
ers dropped: 4. Total cluster bombs
dropped (BL-97): 800. With 80 percent
of the area cleared, we found 484 unex-
ploded BL-97 (60 percent of the total).
2. Kabul Province, Mousajay Village:
248,000 sq m inflected by mines
(agricultural and grazing ground). Dis-
pressers dropped: 6. Total cluster
bombs dropped (BL-97): 1,200. With
90 percent of the area cleared, we
found 513 unexploded BL-97 (43 percent
of the total).

CBUs and the International Community

Overall, CBUs are not considered
similar in the effects to APs. For this
reason, they were not restricted by the
Oslo Treaty. Cluster bombs, which con-
tinue to be used, pollute the environment
and are a serious threat for civilians. They
represent a real limitation to the eco-
nomic development of states and a seri-
ous economic burden for the interna-
tional community.
In fact, a matter of primary impor-
tance is to conduct humanitarian clear-
ance of these affected territories, which
defines areas needing to be 99.6 percent
clear, as international standards dictate.
This kind of percentage involves great
costs and long term funds from the inter-
national community, but gives back a lot
in terms of saving human lives.

Figure 1: Graph of country names.
Figure 2: Contact Information.

Contact Information

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The U.S. government has developed a wide-ranging plan
by the United States
Humanitarian Mine Action Program
to build an indigenous mine action capability within Iraq. The plan
will help rid Iraq of the threat of landmines and UXO so that the
country can focus on rebuilding its society.

by the United States,
Humanitarian Mine Action Program

Imagine growing up in a country
where you had to live with the sounds of gunfire,
and the glow of missiles keeping you awake
every night. Imagine the overwhelming feeling of
joy when these things ended. Imagine wanting to run freely among your
friends, but not being able to, because of the
dangerous objects that lay around your
neighborhood long after the war is over.
Iraq is such a country that now, more than
ever, needs an organized, well-developed
program to remove these threatening objects.
To order to help provide this humanitarian
assistance, the United States government has
developed a robust and wide-ranging
plan to build an indigenous mine action
capability within the country. The plan
will help rid Iraq of the threat of
landmines and UXO. With the help of the
United States, the United Nations and
other countries around the world, Iraq will
be able to foresee the end of its mine
mine problem and focus on rebuilding
its society.

The Landmine/UXO Problem

Iraq has been the victim of violent
contlict throughout its history, which,
in recent years, has left the land plagued with
landmines and UXO, disrupting the social, eco-

ECONOMIC, AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY. BEFORE OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM (OIF), AN ESTIMATED 10-15 MILLION LANDMINES WERE DEPLOYED IN IRAQ, DATING FROM CONFLICTS AS FAR BACK AS WORLD WAR II, WITH THE MAJORITY OF THE LANDMINES Laid DURING THE IRAQI WAR FROM 1990 TO 1988. INTERNATIONAL
Department of State’s (DOS) 1999 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, the Iraqi government declared demining subversive, claiming that such activity violated Security Council resolutions on the need to respect Iraq’s territorial integrity and sovereignty. Iraqi officials ordered workers performing demining activities to leave Iraq, and denied visas to mine action personnel trying to enter the country. The United Nations and many NGOs ignored the order and continued their dangerous work.

Before the current conflict, mine contamination was estimated to affect over 1,000 communities, with reported accidents caused by mines/UXO occurring at an average rate of 31 per month. Since March 2003, the number of casualties has increased significantly. According to Mines Advisory Group (MAG) there have been over 400 casualties in the northern governorates alone.

Much less is known about the landmine problem in the south and central regions of Iraq. Borders with Iran are heavily mined, and the locations of the minefields are generally known. Beyond that, there were reports of Israeli laying mines prior to the most recent conflict, but there is little evidence to substantiate this was widespread. Media reports suggest extensive artillery and aerial bombardment has contributed to the already significant UXO problem throughout the country, particularly in the central region.

The ICRC has carried out MRE programs in 14 governorates and trained 20 NGO volunteers in Baghdad. The World Food Program began distributing MRE information with all food deliveries beginning June 1, 2003. These efforts are also supported by other MRE efforts from various NGOs, the United Nations and the Coalition Information Operations, which includes messages concerning MRE.

**United States Assistance**

The United States began mine action assistance to Iraq in 2002, through separate grants to the Mines Advisory Group (MAG) and the Norwegian People’s Aid (NPA). The grants, totaling $2,160,138, were awarded by the State Department’s Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs to support clearance efforts in the northern governorates.

Currently, the United States government is implementing a robust three-year plan to reduce the threat of landmines/UXO in Iraq after OIF. The Iraqi Relief Supplemental, enacted by Congress in April 2003, provides funding for this project. The plan includes the following initiatives: MRE, the Quick Reaction Demining Force (QRDF), building capacities for mine action coordination and demining operations and expanding existing mine/UXO clearance capabilities.

**Mine Risk Education**

The United States is developing a substantial MRE program throughout Iraq with MAG as the implementing partner. As envisioned, MAG has positioned ten MRE teams in various regions of Iraq. These teams will work with community-based organizations and medias to deliver MRE messages throughout the country.

The DOS, in conjunction with UNICEF, has procured MRE materials for use by NGOs conducting MRE programs at locations with populations that are highly at risk due to UXO/landmines. The materials consist of MRE boxes, flyers and posters, and have been distributed in Basra and Baghdad as of June 2003.

**Quick Reaction Demining Force (QRDF)**

The QRDF deployed from its home base, Metzamorrh, on May 2, 2003, to work on high priority demining operations in Iraq. The force is split into four teams each consisting of at least two deminers, one medic, one team leader, two dog handlers and two mine detection dogs (MDDs). The deployment is anticipated to last approximately four months, and is being implemented by RONCO Consulting Corporation, the State Department’s demining contractor.

**Demining Operations Process Building**

The State Department plans to task RONCO Consulting Corporation to train four teams each consisting of six MDDs. RONCO will retain operational management responsibilities for these teams, provide technical advice and management training, and eventually transfer all assets and control to the successor government’s mine action authority.

**Mine Action Authority**

The present lack of an indigenous mine clearing capability does not preclude an operational capability now. The Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) is acknowledged as the relevant authority in Iraq with respect to mine action. USCENTCOM has established a Mine Explosive Ordnance Coordination Center to provide data interface between the military clearing and the United Nations mine action authority.

Building a mine/UXO clearing capability into the requirements for the New Iraqi Corps is also under consideration, as is the development of a civilian demining corps. Demining efforts will continue long after Coalition forces are redeployed and will take a concerted effort by the United States and the international community to build mine action capability within the nation of Iraq.

**Conclusion**

Even though the Iraqi Mine Action Plan was just initiated and implemented in recent months, there have been many noteworthy accomplishments. Once all programs have fully operational, the people of Iraq can look forward to a day when they will be able to walk the earth in safety.

*All images courtesy of the author.*