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Broadening Mine Action to Include Other Conventional Threats: The Formation of the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (WRA)



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Introduction

The U.S. government has been a pioneer and dedicated supporter of humanitarian mine action since the first mine clearance programs began taking shape in Afghanistan in 1988. Through the investigation of new detection and clearance technologies, the development of indigenous mine action capacities and the formation of a wide array of public-private partnerships, the United States has demonstrated that its response to the persistent landmine problem remains a high priority. Impressive as the combined accomplishments of the U.S. government, the private sector, and other donor governments have been, they still, however, do not provide a full response to the enormous tasks that remain. Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Jr., Special Representative of the President and Secretary of State for Mine Action and the Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military (PM) Affairs, recognizes this reality and has called for an aggressive international mine action agenda in the coming years. Part of this agenda has required the definition of "mine action" to be expanded to include remediation of

abandoned munitions, and small arms and light weapons, with the aim of serving the broader objectives of post-conflict reconstruction and national reconciliation. As a result, the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (WRA) within the Department of State's Bureau of PM Affairs was created to address these issues in a more synergistic manner.

Broadening the Impact of State Department Efforts

To accomplish Special Representative Bloomfield's vision, PM Affairs realigned the construction of the design and implementation of a new office integrating the functions of the Office of Humanitarian Demining Programs (HDP), the Office of Mine Action Initiatives and Partnerships (MAIP), and the Bureau of PM Affairs' Small Arms and Light Weapons (SA/LW) unit to deal even more effectively with precursors to and after-effects of conflict. The establishment of this office is a bold new initiative that recognizes the common problem posed by landmines, UXO, stockpiled and abandoned ordnance (AO) and small arms/light weapons that threaten lives and limbs of civilians and military personnel, destabilize countries and entire regions, and impede efforts to rebuild war-torn societies.

"The threats to public health and social stability in nations affected by persistent landmines, freely available small arms and light weapons, abandoned ordnance, excess man-portable air defense systems, and poorly secured munitions stockpiles are interrelated and should be addressed in a holistic manner," said Bloomfield. "This new office, drawing on the combined skills and successes of its Bureau predecessors, is empowered to more effectively deal with all such weapons of localized destruction."¹

Vision and Intent

The vision of this office, is to foster local, regional and international conditions conducive to peace, stability and prosperity by curbing the proliferation of small arms/light weapons and persistent landmines, and removing and destroying those weapons that remain and pose hazards after the cessation of armed conflict. Key objectives are:

1. Curb the illicit trafficking, availability and indiscriminate use of small arms/light weapons and persistent landmines that fuel regional and internal instability.
2. Pursue post-conflict cleanup of such weapons in areas needed for civilian use.
3. Engage civilian society to broaden these efforts.

These measures will also limit the access of terrorist or criminal groups to such weapons and munitions. At the same time, by addressing the acute humanitarian need created by these weapons, this office will demonstrate our country's commitment to protecting innocent human life. The Bureau of PM Affairs has enhanced its capacity to manage the past effects and elevate the future effects of these weapons.

The Realignment Process

After considering several options, it was decided that it would be best to design the new office in a way that offered an evolving approach that would leave room for change in the future. This option would have the new office overseen by Director, acting, Richard Kidd and broken down into three divisions supervised by Deputy Director James Lawrence (Deputy for Outreach and Public and Congressional Affairs), Deputy Director Col. Tom Seal, United States Marine Corps (Deputy of Programs) and Deputy Director Steve Costner (Deputy of Policy, Plans and Resource Management).

Realignment Functions and Relationships

The WRA (online at www.state.gov/t/pm/wra) deals with countries using a more comprehensive approach. While each section will perform functions and tasks similar to what it did previously, the manner in which these tasks will be organized will depart from past practice. The functions of each unit are as listed below:

Programs (Formerly Office of Humanitarian Demining Programs [PM/HDP])

- Represents the Department of State on the Interagency Policy Coordinating Committee
- Conduct policy assessment visits
- Carries out program management
- Handles financial management (contracts, grants and Integrated Mine Action Support [IMAS] contract)

Policy, Plans and Resource Management (Formerly SA/LW)

- Acts as the interagency lead on SA/LW (including man-portable air defense systems [MANPADS] and bi-lateral strategies) and landmine programs and policy
- Handles small arms/light weapons and landmine policy and program conferences, assessments and destruction
- Carries out program management
- Negotiate international agreements
- Represents U.S. government policy to foreign governments

Outreach and Public and Congressional Affairs (Formerly MAIP)

- Fosters public-private mine partnerships to reinforce mine action.
- Conducts public outreach to publicize and strengthen official mine action and small arms/light weapons mitigation
- Strengthens international mine action institutions
- Manages partnership program grants and contracts
- Monitors and supports international research and development (R&D) and testing and evaluation (T&E) for mine action technologies

In addition to the preceding functions, each unit coordinates with government organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations as well as industry groups and community groups.

Conclusion

On September 19, 2003, a ceremony was held at the State Department to honor all those, past and present, who have carried out the responsibilities of HDP, SA/LW and MAIP. The office became fully functional on Monday, September 22, 2003. The office will continue to provide U.S. humanitarian mine action assistance to nations affected by persistent landmines and UXO and pursue practical measures to reduce illicit trafficking in small arms and light weapons. It will still develop public-private partnerships to support humanitarian mine action and also encourage new private initiatives to help mitigate threats from all weapons of localized destruction. Just as the United States has exercised leadership through its successful but separate humanitarian mine action program and small arms/light weapons (including MANPADS) stabilization efforts, this innovative new approach to small arms/light weapons and persistent landmines, combined with a useful program of action through the consolidated office, will be a model that we hope will be emulated by other nations, international organizations and NGOs.

*All photos courtesy of the author.



From L to R: Steve Costner, Richard Kidd, Deputy Assistant Secretary, Kara Bue, Dick Stickels, Pat Patierno, Special Representative, Lincoln Bloomfield and Jim Lawrence in attendance at the PM/WRA Realignment Ceremony.

References

1. U.S. Department of State Media Note. "Department of State Consolidates SA/LW, Landmine and Shoulder-fire Anti-aircraft Missile Threat Management in New Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement." September 22, 2003.

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