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The Israeli Defense Force's Humanitarian Demining Efforts

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The Israeli Defense Force's Humanitarian Demining Efforts

Introduction

The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Engineering Corps is the mine action center of Israel. Currently, IDF is engaged in various activities in response to the Palestinian terrorist campaign and does not have the resources to participate in international demining programs. However, the Israeli government views the issue of international cooperation in the areas of mine clearance, mine awareness, and mine victim rehabilitation to be of major importance, despite the difficult budgetary situation. In addition, IDF continues to prioritize mine action internally.3

Internal Humanitarian Demining Efforts

All landmines and areas contaminated by UXO are defined as military closed areas; therefore, the IDF Engineering Corps is responsible for any activities on mined territories.4 The IDF policy is based on the removal of outdated mines and other munitions. IDF continues to verify the marking and fencing of landmines and suspected areas in accordance with the provisions of the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW) Amended Protocol II, which restricts the use of mines, booby traps, and other devices. The renewal of fences and markings, whose location is carried out within the context of the IDF’s verifi cation activities.5

The 2003 Landmine Monitor Report, produced by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), reports that in November 2002, Israel disclosed an annual program to destroy outdated mines and stated that no new landmines were put in place within the year. As a follow-up on this statement, in February of 2003, Israel reported that 12 tons of mines were destroyed in 2002.6

Recording Measures

During 2003, the IDF began working to improve the recording measures of several landmines and suspected areas via the use of specific global positioning systems (GPS) and other equipment. This equipment will assist in the management and control of minefields and will enable the Israeli Mapping Center (IMC) to update maps with more accurate locations of landmines.7

Legislation

Israel has not enacted any additional domestic legislation to implement the provisions of Amended Protocol II.8 Israel maintains that the existing Israeli legislation enables the government to implement the provisions of amended Protocol II without the need for additional legislation. This legislation includes, inter alia, export control legislation covering all defense equipment, knowledge and technology. There are also IDF regulations and orders concerning marking, fencing and monitoring as well as demining and disposing of mines, booby-traps and other devices.9

Subsequent to Israel’s ratification of Amended Protocol II, measures were taken to ensure that the relevant authorities in the IDF were cognizant of the provisions of the Protocol and their implications. In addition, IDF interactions and operating procedures are regularly reviewed to verify their compatibility with the provisions of Amended Protocol II.10

The IDF Engineering Corps maintains a set of detailed regulations and instructions regarding the management of archives and the recording of minefields and mined areas. Moreover, the IDF School of Military Law (responsible for the dissemination of the laws of war within the IDF) includes the provisions of the CCW and Amended Protocol II as part of their curriculum. In addition, lectures concerning the conventions and protocol are provided on a regular basis to commanders of the IDF Engineering Corps.11

Public Information

Information provided for the general population regarding Israel’s status as a vis-a-vis Amended Protocol II was disseminated upon Israel’s ratification of the Protocol. To prevent any accidental entry into potentially dangerous areas, warning signs in three languages (Hebrew, Arabic and English) are clearly positioned on the perimeter of the minefields.12

Organizations of field schools (organized by schools, youth movements, workplaces and private citizens) are obligated to coordinate their route with the relevant IDF Area Command. In this context, field trip organizers are briefed as to the location of minefields situated in the area (or suspected areas that are treated as mined until cleared and verified) and are given the appropriate mine awareness instructions.13

Commercially available land maps, issued by the IMC, contain clear markings regarding the location of minefields. The maps are periodically updated by the IMC based on information available to the IDF.14

Criticism of Israel’s Internal Humanitarian Demining Efforts

Israel has been criticized for abstaining from voting on every annual pro­

landmine ban UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution since 1996, including UNGA Resolution 51/74 in November 2002.20 Israel responded by stating that it views landmines as weapons that should be carefully restricted, but not totally banned, as they are often necessary to prevent aggression and attack, particularly given the threatening environment in the region.21

The Landmine Monitor Report cites the United Nations Children’s Fund’s (UNICEF) assessment of the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT). In its report UNICEF states:

Landmines during from the Second World War, and were not fully cleared by the end of the 20th century. Jordan, however, has been working to clear areas of concern since the early 1990s. The Jordanian government and international organizations have carried out large-scale demining operations in Jordan since 1995, and have made significant progress in clearing the country of mines. As of 2003, Jordan had cleared more than 700,000 square kilometers of land, reducing the risk of injury to civilians and allowing for safe movement and access. Jordan’s efforts have been recognized internationally, and the country has been honored with several awards for its demining work.

Maavarm: An Israeli Demining Company

Companies like Maavarm complete mine clearance projects within Israel for civilian purposes. However, the IDF Engineering Corps is required to be involved in any campaigns to remove landmines/UXO within Israel. Like every mine action center (MAC), the IDF Engineering Corps has its specific procedures beyond the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), IDrF requires any organizations that complete demining in Israel to adhere to these procedures. For example, a different type of minefield marking, different lane width and much stricter safety procedures are required. They check the organizations’ plans and approve them. They are responsible for external quality assurance. They also monitor handover procedures.1

At present, Maavarm is involved in a 2–3 month project at Ramat Hovav for the Industrial Council of Ramat Hovav. The project aims to clear an area that was a fire zone in southern Israel, near Beer-Sheva. The area, contaminated with UXO, will be cleared for development.

Maavarm, in conjunction with the Turkish company ARMADA and others, is also in the process of planning to clear mines along the border to allow the area to be used for agriculture. During 2003, Maavarm checked suspected areas for the Jordan Gates Project. The project will establish a free trade area.2

In addition, Maavarm has contributed to international mine clearing efforts. Maavarm experts conducted mine awareness workshops for Kosovo refugees in Albania prior to their return home.3 In 2002, Maavarm cleared 700,000 square kilometers of land, including a railway station in John and a main road in Sibenik, in a World Bank-funded project in Croatia.4

International Humanitarian Demining Efforts

During 1995–2001, Israel, in conjunction with UNICEF, participated in a mine awareness project conducted in Angola. The project was established to educate the local population in various regions of the country about the hazards of mines. Israeli involvement in this project increased during 2002 when four Israeli volunteers, financially sponsored by the GIO (government of Israel), entered the project area.5

In 1997, Israel conducted a joint mine clearance project with Jordan in the Arava Valley to allow for agricultural use of the area.6 In 1998, Israel, Jordan, Canada and Norway participated in a quadrilateral project aimed at mine clearance in the Jordan Valley and medical rehabilitation for Jordanian mine victims. As part of the quadrilateral effort, Israel organized and hosted a workshop on the rehabilitation of mine victims in April 1998.7

Rehabilitation Programs

Israel offers treatment and rehabilitation to Israeli citizens and to residents of the Mediterranean region.8 The Israeli medical establishment treats and rehabilitates individuals who have lost their limbs or have suffered multisystem injuries as a continued on page 23; Israeli Defense Forces’ Humanitarian Demining Efforts

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In the Occupied Palestinian Territories

Introduction

In an August 2002 assessment of the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) reported that the following areas in the OPT are not properly fenced, marked, or cleared:
- Minefields from the 1967 Middle East war—unmarked minefields were reportedly found between Jordan and the West Bank, in the Jordan Valley and in other strategic areas in the West Bank.
- Israeli military training zones.
- Areas of confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians. Though no minefields have been officially declared in the Gaza Strip, Ayad Abu Qash, mine awareness co-coordinator for Defence Children International (DCI), Palestine Section, has no doubt the area is contaminated.

Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) have drawn criticism for their humanitarian demining (HD) efforts, or lack thereof. However, a National Mine Action Committee, composed of both Palestinian and international organizations, has taken the lead in mine awareness efforts in the OPT.

HD efforts by IDF and PNA

In February 2003, Israel outlined its stockpiling demining efforts, stating that 12 tons of mines were destroyed by the military in 2002. However, Abu Qash of DCI told Al Jazeera that Israel’s efforts were not enough. Qash told Al Jazeera, “Practically speaking, there has been no mine clearing. There is a big difference between clearing minefields for military purposes and clearing them for humanitarian purposes. In the latter case, the number of mines must be zero.”

Israeli HD efforts have also been criticized. Last year, the IDF declared the village of Husein, in the West Bank, a mine-free zone. Al Jazeera reports that, following the announcement, three people from the village died when a mine exploded.

Conversely, the PNA has made no official statement about banning anti-personnel mines. Palestinian groups have access to both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. Media reports indicate that these groups are using landmines and explosive devices, made from the explosives taken from landmines, in attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians.

March 2004: Four soldiers were wounded when an explosive device detonated under an IDF tank in the northern Gaza Strip.

April 2003: Four IDF soldiers were injured in the Gaza Strip when they were traveling in a truck in a minefield.

February 2003: Four IDF soldiers were killed when an improvised explosive device detonated under their tank in the Gaza Strip.

March 2002: Three IDF soldiers were killed when their tank ran over a more planted on the Kams 2500 area in the Gaza Strip.

February 2002: Three IDF soldiers were killed and nine wounded when an 80-kg mine exploded under their tank in the Gaza Strip.

November 2000: Two Israeli civilians were killed and nine others, including the children, were injured when a schoolbus struck a roadblock built in the Gaza Strip. Three of the injured children lost limbs in the attack.

HD efforts by the National Mine Action Committee

In response to the lack of mine action in the OPT, a National Mine Action Committee was established by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), UNICEF, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Palestinian government. The Palestinian Red Crescent Society, DCI and Palestine, and the Palestinian Mine Action Centers, Youth and Sports, Interior, and Health are also members. The committee, which was established in August 2002, coordinates mine action activities in the OPT. Activities include:
- Teaching MRE
- Developing a national mine action plan
- Ensuring UXO awareness messages are consistent and coherent
- Carrying out surveys to assist in the appropriate design and prioritization of activities

Abu Qash told Al Jazeera that the emphasis on MRE and awareness activities versus landmine removal activities is due to Israeli restrictions on removal of landmines. A Canadian initiative to demine the village of Husein near Be’er Sheva was stopped short due to an Israeli ban on the import of mine-clearing materials and restrictions on the method of clearing.

Future Danger

DCI emphasized the increased danger that comes with the possible re-deployment of the Israeli army and the hand-over of those areas to the PNA. The fear is that, with the increased mobility of Palestinians in the areas, the number of landmine/UXO accidents will increase. DCI has made it a part of its agenda to address this issue in hopes of avoiding the high number of casualties that occurred following the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon.

References


7. The minefield at the beach is estimated at 3 kilometers of landmines.

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humanitarian demining efforts

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Though no minefields have been officially declared in the Gaza Strip, Ayid Abu Qtaish, mine awareness coordinator for Defcon for Children International (DFCI), Palestinian Section, has no doubt the area is contaminated. 2

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HD Efforts by IDF and PNA

In February 2003, Israel outlined its stockpiles destruction efforts, stating that 12 tons of mines were destroyed by the military in 2002. However, Abu Qtaish of DCFI told Al Jazeera that Israel’s efforts were not enough. Quish told Al Jazeera, “Practically speaking, there has been no mine clearing. There is a big difference between clearing minefields for military purposes and clearing them for humanitarian purposes. In the latter case, the number of mines must be zero.”

Israel HD efforts have also been criticized last year. On December 1, 2004, the village of Hezim, in the West Bank, a mine-free area, Al Jazeera reports that, following the announcement, three people from the village died when a mine exploded. 4

Conversely, the PNA has made no recent official statement about banning anti-personnel mines. Palestinian groups have access to both anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. Media reports indicate that these groups are using landmines and explosive devices, made from the explosives taken from landmines, in attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians. 5

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References


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result of landmines, UXO, IED and other devices.

The Landmine Monitor reports that, in recent years, Israeli rehabilitation specialists were sent, under the auspision of the United Nations and Israeli Foreign Ministry, to Sri Lanka, Vietnam, El Salvador, Croatia and Slovenia. Israel also has a rehabilitation exchange agreement with Armenia, Cyprus, Greece, Turkey and seven states of the former Soviet Union. The Landmine Monitor also mentioned that the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs funds an economic rehabilitation program in Guatemala. The microfinance program seeks to encourage landmine survivors to start their own business.

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March 2004: Three IDF soldiers were killed when their tank ran over a mine planted on the Kamas-Neratzim road in the Gaza Strip.

February 2003: Israeli soldiers killed when an improvised Palestinian landmine detonated on track in the Gaza Strip.

March 2002: Three IDF soldiers were killed when their tank ran over a mine planted on the Hamas-Neratzim road in the Gaza Strip.

February 2002: Three IDF soldiers were killed and a fourth wounded when an 80-kg mine exploded underneath their tank in the Gaza Strip.

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