The Use of Belgian Military Experts in EOD

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than a bit for luck would give an annual incremental cost of $68,000: hardly enough to pay and administer a civilian TA. I have beheld this point because I believe it is ethically the off-repeated assertion that military TAs are more expensive is demonstrably incorrect, and that the cost is paying. Only cannot extrapolate from the per capita incremental cost of a full-scale military operation, or even per capita incremental cost of "becoming" soldiers from visiting military forces, to the incremental cost of deploying an unarmed military TA with no logistics, communications or infrastructure support beyond that which would also be provided to a civilian TA. While debates over the relative quality of military and civilian TAs cannot be conclusively settled because both groups are comprised of individuals whose abilities vary widely, cost is a quantitative issue that can be differentiated from the debate altogether.

Philosophy

If we accept that the question of ability is at least still open and that the question of money has been addressed, we are left with philosophical arguments. This aspect of the debate is a relatively faint echo of the ongoing controversy over the role of military forces in humanitarian operations, and of the off-exaggerated "peace" differences between military and civilian personnel. A key element of this wider controversy—the ability of military personnel to carry out humanitarian tasks—has already been addressed in this article.

Another concern is related to security. This argument suggests that humanitarian workers may be endangered because belligerents won't be able to distinguish between military and civilian personnel who are engaged in similar work, or because humanitarian workers may become targets by virtue of association with the military. However, attacks on humanitarian workers (such as those that have taken place in Afghanistan) are not carried out because of confusion over the military or civilian status of the victims, so because of a perceived threat due to military-civilian cooperation, they are carried out because the attacked wish to drive away humanitarian workers.

The last philosophical argument can be summarized as "it isn't their business," which translates that the military is only interested in humanitarian missions because they are looking for gainful employment in order to justify their existence. In response to the first point, I would suggest that the military men are only interested in humanitarian mine action because they are looking for gainful employment in order to justify their existence. In response to the second point, I would suggest that the military men are only interested in humanitarian mine action because they are looking for gainful employment in order to justify their existence. In response to the third point, the argument that the military men are only interested in humanitarian mine action because they are looking for gainful employment in order to justify their existence. In response to the fourth point, I would suggest that the military men are only interested in humanitarian mine action because they are looking for gainful employment in order to justify their existence.

Conclusion

Although relative quality is difficult to assess, the average ability of military TAs is on par with the rest of the humanitarian mine action community and the financial and philosophical arguments against the military's involvement as a disarmament force. Military TAs are a useful and usable resource, and since it will be startling indeed to hear a mine action manager complain of a surfeit of resources, I must conclude—as promised—that humanitarian mine action benefits from the use of military TAs.

Endnotes

Today the Belgian bomb disposal battalions comprise 23 officers, 151 non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and 131 corporals and civilians, thus a total of 307 personnel of which 172 are bomb disposal experts (16 officers, 100 NCOs and 56 corporals). The battalion is composed of three companies decentralised over the whole national territory. The first task of the unit is the clearance of UXO and AXO left in Belgium from the two world wars. Despite the proposals to dissolve the unit in 1971, the bomb disposal unit still exists today to an average of 3,500 requests a year ranging from hand grenades to aircraft bombs up to 500 kg or more.

Consequently, the battalion handles an average of 250 tons of ammunition every year. Some 20 tests of “problem ammunition” (suspected chemical ammunition) are recovered each year, especially in the area of fighting during WWII.

The battalion’s second mission is the dismantling of toxic and chemical ammunition during from WWII. The dismantling facility is located at the site of conflict during WWII. During 1990 and 1998, seven were carried out on real ammunition to control the feasibility of the installation. The installation has been operational since October 1999.

The third main task calls for the support of judicial authorities in the field of terrorism and organised crime. This responsibility averages around 150 interventions a year for the EOD Battalion. Suspect devices ranging from letter bombs to car bombs are investigated and rendered safe. The unit is also in charge of post-explosion investigations. The EOD Battalion is always ready to intervene in case of a military air crash to recover ammunition and toxic chemical elements. It can also rely on diver bomb disposal experts for diving missions in the hinterland and the territorial water surfaces.

The unit instructs its own bomb disposal experts and organises instructional courses for police forces, judicial authorities and security agents. The basic course to become an EOD operator takes one year. After five years of experience, the non-commissioned EOD officer follows another advanced four-month course. Then the NCO can act as an EOD team leader. In 2003, the Ministry of Defence requested that the bomb disposal school develop an EOD team leader course for foreigners to participate in. This four-month course is available to experienced EOD operators.

Belgian military experts continue to advise researchers involved in programs to support humanitarian demining. Regularly, the EOD operators support Belgian universities, the Royal Military Academy and many civilian universities in their studies with the humanitarian demining domain. The EOD experts constantly test new equipment and provide help to the students, based on their field experience.

The last support provided by the Belgian military experts encompasses the technical assistance to treaty and protocol developments. Belgian Defense sends military experts and both EOD and non-EOD operators to international workshops and symposiums. During these development processes, the military experts can provide counsel to develop treaties and protocols based on their field experiences.

Beginning in 1990, Belgium began requesting UN support for its humanitarian activities and informing the world of its 70 years of lessons learned.


The Belgian EOD operators have been deployed in Bosnia since November 2003 to reinforce the Stabilisation Force (SFOR) mission. The mission of this team is to assist Bosnia in the storage, transportation and demolition of large stocks of ammunition.

Following the past experiences Belgium’s use of military experts in humanitarian demining has an advantage, even if the humanitarian demining is normally not a military mission. When a country uses military experts to build a national EOD capacity to clear the country, the costs are substantially lower. The majority of armies with an EOD capacity developed their own support military operations. During peaceful times, this capacity is available and the operators can be used to clear the UXO on the national territory. The country does not need to pay twice in order to develop an EOD capacity for military operations and an EOD capacity for national territory. It is also evident that the experience gained on the national territory can also be used to support programs abroad.

Military experts usually have a military channel that gives them access to technical information. Thus, when the military experts are involved in support of the humanitarian demining, it is easier to get access to the needed technical information. Directly after a conflict, military units are regularly sent to control the peace process. The military EOD operators are able to start with the urgent clearance operations and disposal of UXO. The co-operation with other forces will only provide benefits to the humanitarian situation. A better coordination between military experts and non-military experts is also an advantage for research and development of mine action technologies with a reduction of the costs and an increase in the research involved.

Conclusion

In conclusion, AP mines are a problem, but they are unfortunately not the only problem after a conflict. Many statistics demonstrate today that UXO represent an important problem that may be larger than the AP mine problem. The experience of Belgium shows that many decades after the end of the hostilities, large quantities of UXO still remain on the ground. The demining activities of minefields and the disposal of UXO are major tasks that will take a long time. It is in the interest of the international community to take into account all available resources, included military operators. They perform the same job as the non-military operators with, in some cases, other priorities and other time schedules.

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