

JORDAN'S Military in Mine Action



Jordan is a country rich in history and beauty. Throughout the years, with the increase of tensions in the Middle East, Jordan has been forced to protect its borders. As a result, Jordan has become a major actor in the mine action community and has taken a different approach by promoting the use of its military for demining and its non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for rehabilitation and mine awareness.

History

The first mines were laid in Jordan in 1948 during a war with Israel. Later, during the Six-Day Arab-Israeli War in 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank and developed a new cease-fire line, Jordan began planting more mines along its western border. In the 1970s, Jordan experienced a Syrian threat, and numerous internal problems led to more mine planting. Thus, Jordan quickly moved from a mine-free country to a kingdom burdened with minefields along its western and northern borders.

Over 15,000 acres of land, bountiful in natural resources and sacred sites, quickly became consumed with mines. The total number of landmines stretched beyond 300,000, of which over 225,000 were laid by the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) and over 70,000 by Israel.¹

Before his death, His Majesty King Hussein called for the clearance of all minefields by the year 2000. In March 1993, the Jordanian government implemented its first phase in a three-phase demining plan. In 1998, Jordan signed and ratified the Ottawa Treaty. Today, the govern-

ment continues to support numerous mine action conventions and conferences, and submits updates on the status of its stockpile destruction program.²

King Abdullah commissioned the National Demining and Rehabilitation Committee (NDRC) in March of 2000. This committee participates in various demining aspects from mine risk education (MRE) to mine clearance. New associations continue to emerge in Jordan, such as the Hashemite Society for Soldiers with Special Needs, Landmine Survivors Network, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the Al Hussein Foundation for the Habilitation and Rehabilitation of the Disabled, and Queen Noor still plays an active role in demining. However, the Jordanian army's Royal Engineers Corps (REC) remains the key force in demining.³

Through the REC's success in Jordan, the army has begun to stretch its boundaries. Currently, the REC is working in Afghanistan in an effort to demine the country and return the land back to the Afghan people. Aiding Afghanistan in its move to rebuild a country torn apart by the Taliban is not only noble, but it will also provide the REC with more experience in battling its problem at home.

Interview With a Jordan Military Mine Specialist⁸

Q: What skills does the military bring to humanitarian demining that humanitarian organizations might lack?

A: The sole deminer in Jordan is the military's Royal Engineer Corps (REC). The military deminers are skillful, professional, highly motivated and adapting to international demining standards. REC has led in the removal of mines from inhabited and agricultural areas, thus lowering the number of casualties. Through these operations REC's knowledge has increased in humanitarian aspects of demining, and they have exchanged important information with concerned parties.

Q: How do you feel the military approach to mine action is different from the humanitarian approach?

A: The military approach is different in that demining is only a small portion of their professional goal. Their main goal is to serve their country without concern for extraordinary remuneration. They never hesitate to do their duty, while trying to do their best in preserving their countrymen's lives and their equipment.

Q: Has the role of the Jordan military changed humanitarian demining: the methods used, the strategy, etc. ...?

A: Jordan's demining project has had its own challenges, which has led to adopting special methods and strategies. These can only be achieved by the military through proper training, professionalism and discipline.

Q: What challenges has the Jordan military experienced in humanitarian demining operations?

A: Many challenges were faced, which can be summarized in the following:

- High temperatures and severe weather
- Erosion and shifting minefields
- Heavy vegetation
- Sensitivity of mines due to passage of time
- Deeply buried mines
- Some minefields are in swampy areas

Q: Can you tell me how the Jordan military became involved in Afghanistan?

A: The Jordanian military went to Afghanistan because of its good reputation and to enhance Jordan's role in international humanitarian activities in respect to international agreements.

Q: What goals does Jordan hope for in Afghanistan?

A: That our operations in Afghanistan show Jordan's commitment to humanitarian demining and the role we play in the international arena.

Q: Have you experienced difficulties: Taliban, rebels, environment and dealing with other countries?

A: Every job comes with difficulties. The REC found that pieces of UXO brought the most difficulty as they are very dangerous because there are many different types.

Q: Is there any added benefit in using the military in Afghanistan instead of NGOs?

A: We cannot answer that question, but we can say that in an unsafe environment it is better to give the job to the military, as they can protect themselves.

Q: How do you coordinate efforts with NGOs?

A: Presently, the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation handles the coordination; however, originally REC was responsible for coordinating visits to demining sites.

Q: What are some of the success stories in Afghanistan?

A: We believe the best success stories are shown through our numbers:

- Area cleared: 225,000 sq m
- UXO and mine removal: 473
- Total cost: \$1.5 million (U.S.)

Beyond the numbers, we have cleared roads, purified water and provided medical assistance.

Q: Is the Jordan military currently or thinking about performing demining operations in other countries?

A: We are ready to study any request through our chain of command.

Q: What are the future plans or possibilities for the Jordan military in humanitarian demining?

A: The REC will continue demining in Jordan until we achieve our goal of a "Jordan free of mines." However, this will require no less than \$150 million through coordination with the donors.

Current REC Efforts

The new estimated completion date for the three-phase demining plan in Jordan is the year 2009.² To date, the REC asserts its clearance actions are progressing well, as it has cleared nearly 100,000 AP and anti-vehicle (AV) mines.² General Fayeze Al-Dwairi, Commander of REC, told the *Landmine Monitor Report* that Jordan's first goal is to concentrate on clearing land that will help improve Jordan's economy through development, even though this land can be the most difficult to reclaim.²

Jordan is one of the many landmine-infested countries in the Middle East. Thus, the REC's superior knowledge in demining and Jordan's efforts to promote a mine-safe world were the main reasons the international community was delighted to have 13 Royal Jordanian Engineer Corps deminers deploy to Afghanistan. December 2002 marked Jordan's first effort to participate in an international mine clearance operation.

Afghanistan Efforts

The Jordanian military, along with numerous coalition forces, is also taking part in *Operation Enduring Freedom* by sending soldiers to Afghanistan in an effort to rebuild the country. After numerous battles and especially the Russian occupation in the 1980s, it is estimated that over 10 million mines exist in Afghanistan, which continue to severely hinder the international reconstruction efforts.

Bagram Airbase

The first deployment of REC deminers was stationed at the Bagram Airbase. By using the Aardvark chain flail system that is designed to destroy AP and AT mines while cutting through vegetation, over 23,100 sq m have been cleared by Jordanian REC deminers.⁷ The Aardvark has been highly successful, detonating 95 percent of the AP mines and 100 percent of the AT mines.

With the expertise and skills gained in Jordan, the REC demining team provided in-depth knowledge to the demining operations in Bagram. This 13-member team consisted of mechanics, drivers, guides and maintenance specialists. Although the Jordanians have experienced great difficulty in demining their country, Afghanistan has proven to be even more challenging to the team. The

rugged terrain and numerous battles with their associated debris forced the team to replace the chains on the flail once a week.

The camaraderie at Bagram Airbase was valuable to the Jordanian team. American forces provided "shelter, food and security for the engineers."⁸ Other coalition forces provided maintenance and parts to the demining team, while Afghans followed behind the Aardvark clearing the land of detonated mines.

Kandahar Air Field

With the completion at Bagram Airbase, the Jordanian team was redeployed for a three-month tour to Kandahar Air Field (KAF) to clear the surrounding area. Their equipment did not stand up as well as the team members. The REC soon discovered the Aardvark's rotor was broken. Due to its massive weight, five tons, the new rotor took four months to deliver from Britain. After promptly installing the new rotor, the 13-member team began working.

Unfortunately, the REC team found it once more difficult to demine the debris-infested desert ground. The hammers located at the end of each chain, which "deliver one ton of pressure and dig 12–20 inches into the ground, for a total of 72 tons of pressure on a space three inches wide and 10 feet long,"⁶ were frequently destroyed by the harsh ground conditions. In fact, 1st Lt. Ashraf Odat stated, "We stop every 15 minutes and check the rotor. We replace about 10 hammers a day."⁶ The KAF demining proved to be a considerably slower process than Bagram Airbase.

The Jordan REC demining team is one of two units stationed at KAF. Jordan's

team is led by the Task Force Devil mine action center, which searches for cleared land, new buildings and roads that can be constructed. Once the KAF is cleared and safe, coalition forces will turn it over to the Afghan government. As Staff Sgt. Oscar Rodriguez, U.S. Army 27th Engineer Battalion out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, stated, "Every inch they [the members of the Jordanian team] clear is one more inch we can use. And when we leave, it's ground the Afghan people can use."⁶

Conclusion

Jordanian mine action efforts by the military have cleared about 100,000 mines since 1993. The REC has notably changed Jordan from a country constricted by mines to a country thriving in new development. The Jordanian government felt the economic and social pain from mines, but took action to bring back the freedom they once had as a mine-free country. Now the government continues its search for freedom and peace beyond the Kingdom's borders. Jordan takes an active role in the international arena and impacts nations by its example of promoting mine clearance through military demining efforts.

On a WorldNet Dialogue among numerous countries, one Jordanian general urged fellow leaders to pursue demining efforts by using their militaries and to leave rehabilitation and mine awareness to NGOs. His strong endorsement of this "more beneficial and effective" method of mine clearance will hopefully encourage other nations to follow suit.⁷ Although Jordan has had great success in its military demining effort, its military

clearance campaign has not yet taken great effect around the world. NGOs remain the number one demining agents. Fortunately, Jordan continues to assert its campaign by sending its experienced teams to mine-infested regions such as Afghanistan and other parts of the world.

* Photo c/o AP.

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