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# Landmines in Lebanon: An Historic Overview and the Current Situation

Current estimates approximate the number of landmines in Lebanon to be about 150,000. Funding and assistance from various organizations and governments are helping the country cope with its landmine situation and the resulting problems.



■ There are many areas that still need surveying in Lebanon.

by **Harald A. Wie, Mine Action Advisor, UNDP/ERD Lebanon**

## Background<sup>1</sup>

It is estimated that 150,000 landmines of all categories are currently in Lebanon. The exact location of most of these weapons remains unknown. In addition, a large number of UXO continues to pose a serious threat to local populations, particularly in the south.

Following the end of the war, landmines became one of the most

serious problems facing civilians as they began to reclaim their homes and undertake the post-war reconstruction process. The problem was particularly acute in the capital of Beirut. In an attempt to effectively address the situation, engineering units of the Lebanese Army subsequently conducted reconnaissance and assessment missions to gather detailed information about the mine fields and suspected areas in order to commence mine clearance operations.

Recognizing the serious humanitarian nature of the problem

and with a determination to further strengthen their mine action capacity, the Lebanese authorities have asked the United Nations for support.

## UNIFIL

Since 1978, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) has maintained a presence of over 4,500 troops in the southern region of the country whose mandate is to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli forces and to restore international peace and security. UNIFIL is also



charged with the responsibility of assisting the government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the southern region (SC RES 425). On 31 July 2001, the Security Council extended its mandate until 31 January 2002 (SC RES 1365).

### The Lebanese Army

According to military sources, landmines were emplaced in Lebanon from 1975 to 1990. The majority of the parties who participated in the war used landmines to consolidate their defensive positions along the demarcation lines, which have moved many times. Most of these landmines were deployed indiscriminately and hastily without any records. Only some of the mine fields and suspected areas are fenced and marked.

Since 1990, mine clearance, addressing humanitarian and rehabilitation needs, has been conducted successfully by the Engineer Regiment of the Lebanese Army, which is well structured to implement these tasks. According to a briefing paper that was made available to the mission team 743 mine fields with approximately 3,183 AT mines and 24,271 AP mines were counted in Lebanese territory, except the occupied areas, as of December 1998. Of these, 471 mine fields and suspected areas were treated, and almost 2,383 AT mines and 23,693 AP mines and a large number of UXO were removed between 13 October 1990 and 1 December 1998 by the Engineer Regiment. According to sources, 208 treated/cleared mine fields are still suspected of being unsafe. In addition, an estimated 30,000 items of unexploded ordnance are scattered in the Lebanese Territories occupied by Israel.

The AP mines laid by the Lebanese Army and/or militias and non-Lebanese parties are of Russian, Belgian, France, Israeli, Italian, Chinese, U.S. and Swedish origin.

Some of the mines are of a low-metal variety that makes them difficult to detect, and they have an almost unlimited life span. The AT mines are mostly of Russian, Italian, Yugoslavian and U.S. origin.

According to information provided to the team by the commander of the engineer regiment, the total number of mine fields and suspected areas which were untreated was 272, as of 1 December 1998. They know according to the records that there are 24 AT and 2881 AP mines in the fields. But, there are numerous contaminated areas throughout the country that remain unknown and require survey.

Although most of the mined areas have been cleared by the military, the actual status of these clearing operations remains unknown. As a result, mines and UXO are often found by farmers, who usually inform the local NGOs or authorities. The



army disposes of mines by detonating them in place.

### Victims Assistance

The Ministry of Social Affairs with the United Nation Population Fund (UNPF) has registered handicapped persons by type and cause in Lebanon in 1996. Cause is subdivided into five categories: 1) accident, 2) since birth, 3) illness, 4) war and 5) others. Mine and UXO accidents are included in the 'war' category, which includes 11.9 percent (3,561 persons) of the national total of 29,866 handicapped persons. This of course does not include those killed

by mines or UXO.<sup>11</sup>

In 1996, the World Rehabilitation Fund (WRF) and the Ministry of Health with several community based organizations (CBOs) undertook a survey of the Lebanese landmine problem. Their findings concluded that in 52 out of 65 villages, the civilian accidents from 1975 to 1996 resulted in 212 injuries and 189 deaths out of a total population of 200,000. The details of this study show that the majority of the accidents occurred during specific events such as Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon and the 1991 return of previously displaced civilians to the area.

### Detection and Clearance

Following the end of the conflict in 1990, the Lebanese armed forces began to address the threat posed by mines. According to the military, between 1990 and 1998 the majority of known and identified mine fields has been cleared. The Engineering Regiment consists of four demining companies with a total of 240 deminers. The mine clearance operation, addressing the humanitarian and rehabilitation needs, has been successfully conducted. Their work is often reactive rather than proactive because they are responsible for all countrywide mine clearance/UXO operations. Quite frequently, their work is interrupted, delayed or stopped altogether because of emergency requests from downtown Beirut or other areas.

The clearance operations were mostly conducted by manual techniques (prodding) rather than with technical means like mine detectors. Deminers are reluctant to use them since the majority of the AP mines tend to be plastic, and the land is saturated with metallic fragments and shrapnel. Because mine fields are often located away from roads in areas inaccessible to mechanical devices, it

is impossible to use rollers. Progress is slow, though there is a need to operate with great speed and effectiveness. To strengthen local capacities, the U.S. government has provided technical assistance towards developing and upgrading human and technical demining capabilities.

To economize future activity, coordination started among all concerned on developing an operational plan of action at the national level. It was launched by the Lebanese Army, governmental agencies, NGOs and CBOs within the framework of the National Demining Office (NDO). The NDO was created in accordance with Council of Ministers' resolution No. 29 of 15 April 1998. The main goal of the NDO is to clear the country of landmines and UXOs, and increase the Lebanese population's awareness of the problem, and prevent further injury through mine awareness programs and campaigns.

Mine clearance priorities are established by the NDO and presented to the Chief of Operations for approval. The requirements for mine clearance are submitted to the NDO by ministries and other sources in an ad-hoc manner.

### Mine Awareness

Mine awareness education is being undertaken within the NDO and is implemented by the Lebanese Army, NGOs and CBOs. The WRF provides the financial support and technical assistance for these activities. No attempt by this assessment team has been made to evaluate either current mine awareness programs or the various communication strategies to disseminate messages.

Currently, mine awareness programs are being undertaken in targeted areas by the Lebanese Army and the NGO community in coordination with local CBOs. A Technical Committee on Mine

Awareness has been established in partnership involving the WRF, the Landmine Resource Centre and the NGO community.

### Advocacy and International Conventions

Although the Lebanese government appears to be



sympathetic towards the international ban on antipersonnel landmines, due to the ongoing conflict, it is currently unwilling to sign the Ottawa Convention and the amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). The government of Lebanon has indicated its intention to sign both Landmine Conventions as soon as GA Resolution 425 is successfully implemented and the government of Israel signs the same Conventions.

### The Situation after the Withdrawal of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)

In May 2000, the IDF withdrew from South Lebanon. Since then, it has handed over maps and sketches to UNIFIL, which has transferred the maps to the government of Lebanon. The maps contain an overview and information about 108 border mine fields, 15 inland mine fields and 288 booby traps. The coverage and the accuracy of these maps are still controversial.

### Scope of the Problem

While information on the landmine and UXO problem in South

Lebanon still remains incomplete, it is anticipated that an estimated 150,000 landmines are spread across the country.

### Impact of the Problem

Mines and UXO have so far caused a relatively low number of injuries. This is likely to change with the anticipated return of displaced populations, who are unaware of the threat and of the location of dangerous areas. The problem will complicate the return of displaced persons and may hinder long-term reconstruction and socio-economic development of the region. In the 14 months following the withdrawal, there have been 139 civilian mine casualties (15 fatalities<sup>2</sup>). The Lebanese Army has a landmine database to record mine areas in Lebanon and completion reports—though details are still not known to the public.

### National Capacity and Coordination

#### Mandate

The responsibility for coordinating mine action activities in Lebanon rests with the NDO, established by decree in 1998 as part of the Army and fully staffed by military officers. The NDO has interacted with all concerned partners, including the Lebanese Red Cross and concerned NGOs, such as the Landmine Resources Center (LMRC) at Balamand University. At the International High Level Workshop on Mine Action in May, the NDO presented its National Strategic Mine Action Plan for Lebanon 2001—2006.

#### Mine Awareness

National Mine Awareness activities have been undertaken by NDO in close cooperation with UNICEF, ICRC, LRC, WRF and LMRC funded by USAID.



### Mine Marking and Clearance

The Lebanese Army reportedly has about 120 deminers operating throughout Lebanon.

### Mine Victims Assistance

South Lebanon benefits from a good network of first aid posts managed by the Lebanese Red Cross and good hospitals. However, pre-hospital care is one of the parts of the health care system in Lebanon that needs to be strengthened.

### UN System Response: Improving National Capacity and Coordination

#### Mandate

In 1999 United Nations Mine Action (UNMAS) conducted a Mine Action Assessment mission to Lebanon, and in addition UNMAS followed up with an initial mine action assessment mission to south Lebanon over the period 26 March – 1 June 2000. This mission confirmed the findings done by the Joint Assessment Mission, and it also included a recommendation to establish a coordination mechanism within UNIFIL.

Since these missions, the UNDP country office has been involved with follow-up activities to strengthen national capacity on a limited basis in its technical assistance capacity. A UN Mine Action Advisor is currently assisting the NDO to develop a National Humanitarian Mine Action Plan.

In February 2001, a joint UNMAS and UNDP/ERD<sup>3</sup> mission visited Lebanon in order to assess how the UN system could assist the government in order to accelerate mine action activities beginning with the south and how to strengthen the long term national capacity. The mission produced an "Outline Strategy for the Assistance to Mine Action in Lebanon."

The aim of this paper is to provide an outline strategy for United Nations assistance to mine action in Lebanon.

Clarity of purpose regarding development assistance, as well as accountability and transparency in its application, are essential to successful international cooperation. The timely and efficient use of external assistance resources will help to accelerate the important work already begun by the Government of Lebanon through the NDO in addressing the impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance on the reconstruction and development of Lebanon. The objectives of the strategy are:

- To ensure the acceleration of mine action operations, particularly in the south.
- To assist the government of Lebanon in strengthening its capacity in all areas of mine action.

Based on Inter-Agency Mission Report and the UN Outline Strategy UNDP, in cooperation with the National Demining Office, has developed a Capacity Building Project Document for the support of the NDO.

Last May (one year after the withdrawal of the Israeli Defence Forces) the government of Lebanon in cooperation with UNDP/PRSG's Office, sponsored by the Italian Government, arranged an "International High Level Workshop on Mine Action in Lebanon" in Beirut/Nabathiet. At this workshop the Personal Representative for the Secretary General (PRSG) announced the establishment of an "International Support Group" (ISG) for Mine Action in Lebanon. At the workshop, the UAE announced its pledge of \$50 million (U.S.) for demining operations in South Lebanon. Both initiatives are currently closely followed up by the PRSG's Office and UNDP.

### Ongoing and Future Projects

#### Ongoing Projects

At the end of February 2001 the U.S. started up a Mine Dog Detection (MDD) training program in

partnership with the NDO and will provide the Lebanese Armed Forces with a MDD capacity consisting of 18 dogs during the next 12 months.

Mines Advisory Group (MAG), UK in partnership with the NDO, has trained 15 civilian deminers through a six-month mine clearance project in Nabathieh funded by ECHO. This project is likely to be extended for 12 more months with funds from the EU. The Italian NGO Asso Bon has just finalized a one-month clearance project.

An Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA) is currently operational within UNIFIL through a Mine Action Coordination Cell (MACC) provided by UNMAS. Version 2 of the IMSMA will soon be established at the NDO office in Beirut.

#### Future Projects

A National (Socio-Economic) Impact Survey has been designed and will soon be conducted by the NDO, and funded by the EU.

MAG, in partnership with the NDO and with funding from the UN Voluntary Trust Fund and the Norwegian government, will start a level Two Technical Survey during the next couple of months.

### Other UN Assistance to National and Local Authorities

Based on the recommendation in the UNMAS's reports, the following initiatives have been taken during June 2000 and June 2001. Ref. UN Portfolio of Mine-related projects May 2001.

- UNDP contracted a Mine Action Advisor (MAA) in June 2000 to work on a capacity building project for the NDO. The MAA's current contract with UNDP/ERD expires on February 2002.

- The UNOPS/UNMAS established the MACC/UNIFIL July 2000—Dec. 2001.

- The NDO had one senior

officer at the senior Management Training Course at Cranfield University in August/September 2000.

- Invitation of the Director of the NDO to the UNOPS Management training NY, Oct. 2000.

- The Director of the NDO was invited to UNMAS fourth Meeting of Mine Action Programme Directors and Advisors at the GICHD International Workshop in February 2001.

- The Director of the NDO was invited to the Senior Mine Action Manager course at Cranfield University in August 2001.

- A study tour to take the Director of the NDO and one representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to visit countries that are in the same or similar situation, has been funded by the Norwegian government, and this project will be conducted later in 2001.

#### Information Management

Invitation for training on IMSMA in Geneva in September 2000. The NDO and the Landmine Resource Center participated.

#### Quality Control, Training and Standards

Through the Ministry of Defence, the NDO and the Lebanese Army had four participants at the IMAS training in Beirut on 3–4 July 2001.

#### Resource Mobilization

Two donor meetings were held in 2000. The first was an UN/Donor meeting in July with a field trip to south Lebanon that was conducted by UNDP in cooperation with the NDO. The second meeting was conducted in November, but unfortunately the NDO could not attend.

In September, a NGO conference, funded by the Italian Government, took place in Beirut, and one of the issues was Mine Action. The NDO participated and made a presentation of its National Mine Action Plan.

On May 21—22 an International

High Level Workshop for demining Lebanon starting with the South was conducted in Beirut with a field trip to Nabathiet on the second day to see demonstrations of various demining techniques and tools. The Italian Government also funded this workshop.

#### Advocacy

The government of Lebanon was invited to the Second Meeting of States Parties, in Geneva, in September 2000.

The Government of Lebanon was invited to the third Meeting of States Parties, in September 2001.

### Current Situation

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) pledged \$50 million (U.S.) for demining operations in south Lebanon at the International High Level Workshop (IHLW) in May. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the government of Lebanon (GoL) and the UAE is currently in progress.

At the IHLW, the PRSG announced the establishment of an International Support Group (ISG) for Demining in Lebanon was made by the PRSG. The practical arrangements to establish the ISG are in progress.

UNDP, in cooperation with the NDO, has designed a Pro Doc for capacity building (CB) of the NDO. The Pro Doc has been verbally introduced to the Minister of Defense; however, it is currently with the Director of the NDO for final consideration.

UNDP, through advocacy efforts, has made a sound foundation for a future cooperation not only with



■ The National Demining office determines priority areas.

the NDO but also at the Minister of Defense level as well as with the Lebanese Army.

The donor community in Lebanon is still eager to assist the GoL to solve the mine problem. The government of Lebanon, however, must acknowledge the ownership to mine action by providing the necessary mechanisms with the international community, to provide transparency, accountability and efficiency. ■

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- 1) Lebanon Assessment Mission Report, 1999
- 2) Source: Landmine Resource Center, July 2001
- 3) Emergency Response Division

\*All photos courtesy of Mr. Kerei Ruru, Operation Officer at the UN Mine Action Coordination Center

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