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Yemen Humanitarian Demining Program

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Establishing a demining program in Yemen had proven to be a challenge for many organizations. In 1997, the government of Yemen requested humanitarian demining U.S. assistance and in 1998 USCENTCOM started a viable demining program.

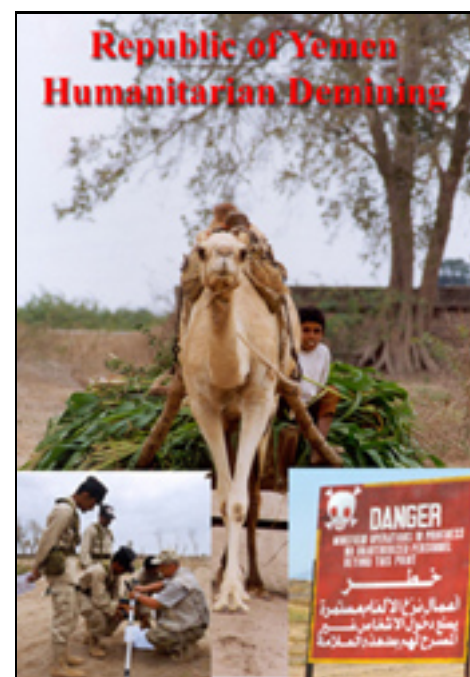
by **Commander Jack Holly, USN**

Background

The Republic of Yemen is the southern-most nation on the Arabian Peninsula and has unique geographic features for this region. Like most Middle East countries, it contains desert land, rich oil reserves, and major ports for shipping. Unlike its neighbors, Yemen's landscape rises quickly from the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden into mountain ranges well over 2,000 meters above sea level. Much of this landscape is fertile farmland on which the Yemeni people grow their food and raise livestock.

Prior to seeking U.S. assistance, the government of Yemen removed more than 68,000 mines through the use of outdated Soviet equipment. They organized small groups of demining soldiers, but due to a lack of demining equipment and training they had only limited success. In March of 1995, The United Nations Department of Humanitarian Affairs (UNDHA) attempted to train deminers but this initiative was relatively unsuccessful. Due to poor quality control methods and faulty equipment, as many as 20 mines may remain in any field listed as cleared by the UN-trained Yemen military.

In June 1997 the government of Yemen formally requested U.S. Humanitarian Demining (HD) assistance through the U.S. Embassy in Sana'a, which was subsequently approved by the Interagency Working Group on Humanitarian Demining. After receiving the Department of State's Policy Assessment Visit report, U.S. Central Command (US-CENTCOM) led a Requirements Determination Site Survey (RDSS) in November 1997 to assess Yemen's requirements, their commitment, and capability to establish an indigenous and viable demining organization. A Pre-deployment Site Survey



was conducted in April 1998 and the USCENTCOM-sponsored train-the-trainer program, which included survey and clearance techniques, mine awareness, medical trauma and victim assistance, information management, and mine action headquarters staff training began in October 1998.



The Problem

Yemen's landmine problem is a result of a series of conflicts dating back to mid-1960. During the intervening years, strife between the north and south, an insurrection, and tribal clashes left the country littered with mines. A tenuous peace was established in 1990; however, between May and July 1994, that peace erupted into further civil war. During these conflicts an estimated 75,000 – 100,000 mines were laid, primarily in the Aden and Hadramaut areas. Inexperienced soldiers and members of the militia placed the mines, often in indiscriminate patterns with little recording, marking, or fencing. Unexploded ordnance (UXO) of various types and national origin is interspersed in the mined areas. By a ratio of 10:1, the mines are anti-tank (AT) to anti-personnel (AP), and were generally laid randomly, often in hasty defensive positions. There has been no indication of the use of any trip wires or anti-handling devices in the mine fields previously cleared.

The mines, in addition to their toll in human and animal suffering, have had an incalculable effect on local economies, both as an impediment to agriculture and through denial of roads critical to the populace. A Level I Landmine Impact Survey was conducted from July 1999 to July 2000 by The Survey Action Center in conjunction with the Afghan-based Mine Clearance Planning Agency (MCPA). The findings and information of this report are recorded and stored on the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA). The survey found that there are 592 mine-affected communities and 1,078 mine danger areas, covering over 900 square kilometers. Each of the communities is affected in its own way. The mined areas restrict access to thousands of square kilometers of land that once was used for roads, pastures, farmland, agriculture and water. The mined areas have also had an incalculable negative effect on transportation, the economy, international trade (ports) and tourism.



Deminers at work in Yemen

One of the goals of the Level I (One) Impact Survey was to identify and differentiate between high, moderate and lightly impacted communities. The 592 landmine-affected communities are located in 8 governorates primarily in the south and central regions of Yemen. The mine-affected communities tend to be grouped in clusters. The survey identified two large clusters and several smaller ones with residual communities dispersed across the country. There are 14 communities considered highly impacted, 84 moderately impacted, and 494 lightly impacted.

The Level I (One) Survey reports an estimated 828,000 people live in the affected communities, of which about 36,000 people are believed to be living in high-impact communities and an estimated 118,000 people in medium-impact communities. The majority live in communities that the Level I (One) Survey rated as low-impact. Overall, Yemen has suffered 5,004 mine-related casualties, of which 2,560 were fatal. In the past 24 months there have been at least 178 mine victims of which 57 died. The majority of casualties were male livestock herders.

National Demining Organization (NDO)

The National Mine Action Committee

While developing the training plan for Yemen, organizational considerations were of significant importance, as the question of donor support to military-led HD organizations was, and continues to be, a major concern. The National Mine Action Committee (NMAC) in Yemen is regionally unique in that it is one of the few national programs in which the civilian and military sectors share responsibility. The Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs chairs the National Mine Action Committee and provides guidance regarding the direction and scope of activity. The Minister of Defense is a member of the committee and has the responsibility for implementing this guidance. At the regional level, a Branch Committee exists and is composed of a set of directors reflecting local health, transportation, and education interests. The Branch Committee mirrors the NMAC and consolidates regional requirements for consideration by the NMAC.

National Technical Executive Unit (NTEU)

Subordinate to the National Mine Action Committee are the National and Regional Technical Executive Units located in Sana'a and Aden respectively. The National and Regional Technical Executive Units are staffed predominately by military personnel, but have offices at each location intended for the use of civilian ministerial representatives, NGO's, and other donors. The NTEU maintains responsibility for oversight of the National Demining Training Center and the Regional Technical Executive Unit in Aden; as well as coordination of all national demining, mine awareness and victim assistance activities, based on the direction received from the NMAC.

Regional Technical Executive Unit (RTEU)

The Regional Technical Executive Unit staff is the operational arm of the Yemeni Humanitarian Demining Program, performing the full range of demining and demining-related activities. It maintains command and control of the regionally assigned demining companies and responsibility for planning, training, and providing logistical support for all regional activities directed by the NTEU. The RTEU, in its current form, formalizes 58-ancillary support positions at the headquarters and Dar Saad Compound, and also added a transportation maintenance section.

National Demining Training Center (NDTC)

NDTC, the core of Yemen demining training, is operated through the National Technical Executive Unit and will maintain the standards and program content. The Center is responsible for training all Humanitarian Demining personnel, regardless of assigned region. Additionally, it is responsible for maintaining the currency and accuracy of course materials and will respond as required to training requirements delivered through the NTEU. The Center

Strategic Mine Action Plan For Yemen

Yemen's vision is to be free from the negative humanitarian and economic effects of landmines:

- At the community level, mine accidents eliminated or reduced to a negligible rate.
- At the national level, no significant economic activity or development project prevented by the presence of landmines or UXO.
- The effects of mines and UXO reduced by clearance of the most dangerous areas, and a Mine Awareness and Marking program that will minimize the danger in other areas until clearance can be accomplished.

Calendar Year 2001

To capitalize on the Level I (One) Impact Survey (for which fieldwork was completed in July of 2000, with data analysis completed in December of 2000), calendar year 2001 emphasizes Level II (Two) Technical Survey. Area reduction and clearance will be focused on those communities that the Level I (One) Impact Survey determined to be most at risk/affected by landmine contamination. Two additional mine action companies will complete training by the end of the year (200 additional personnel). A sustainable Management Information System (IMSMA) will be fully functional and a Mine Detecting Dog capability demonstration will begin.

Calendar Year 2002

Expansion of the program will continue in 2002. The last of eight mine action companies, each including Mine Awareness and Victim Assistance units, will be trained, equipped, and deployed. Three additional Technical Survey Teams will be deployed, and the first four operational Mine Detection Dog Teams (four dogs each) will be fielded. A National Accreditation, Licensing and Quality Management system will be developed to ensure compliance with International Standards.

Calendar Year 2003

In 2003, four Mine Detection Dog teams will be trained, equipped, and fielded. By the end of 2003, the program will be fully developed with eight mine action companies, eight Survey Teams, and eight Mine Detection Dog teams all operating under the supervision of the NDC, the NTEU, and the RTEU.

Calendar Year 2004

Capacity development for all aspects of Mine Action will continue. Deminers, mine awareness, surveyors, quality assurance, and information management specialists will continue to be trained and join the operational HD organizations.

Calendar Year 2005

By 2005 a sustainable National Mine Action management process and organization structure will be fully functional. Replacement of equipment, renovation of facilities and training will continue as required.



UXO clearance and destruction.

Program Development Accomplishments

Yemen's Humanitarian Demining Program has produced commendable results. Since the U.S. policy decision to assist Yemen with its mine problem, the U.S. military trained the Yemeni cadre at the National Demining Training Center (NDTC) who now conducts initial, refresher, and safety training for all mine action personnel. USCENTCOM, in conjunction with the Department of State, has trained, equipped, and helped field four demining companies, and will equip two additional companies in the late fall of 2001, with two additional companies in 2002/03. The U.S. assisted in training and equipping the staffs of the National (NTEU) and Regional Technical Executive Units (RTEU). As of December 2000, the Yemen HD Program has 400 fully trained mine-survey, mine-clearance, mine-awareness, and victim-assistance personnel organized into four mine action companies. The NDTC has established a Mine Awareness Advisory Committee (MAAC) and Working Groups to assist with planning and evaluation of mine awareness and victim assistance activities. Additionally, the U.S. renovated a significant portion of the Dar Saad Compound, previously occupied by a Combat Engineer Battalion, which now serves as home base to the four demining companies, the National Demining Training Center, the newly renovated maintenance facility, and the RTEU.



National Demining Structure



National Demining Center



Regional Demining Centers

Progress as of March 2001

Yemen cleared twenty-six mine fields in the Aden area. Eleven mine fields, totaling 427,487 square meters, have been turned over to the government for agricultural or transportation use. Fourteen mine fields, totaling 675,710 square meters, have been cleared and are awaiting quality assurance (QA) before return to the government. Two mine fields were partially cleared to 90 percent due to drifting sand, total 129,030 square meters. A total of 192.8 square kilometers have been cleared since demining operations started in 1998. In addition, 51,647 UXO, 568 Anti-Tank Mines and 350 Anti-Personnel Mines were destroyed.

The goal since program inception has been to make the country mine safe in five years and mine free in ten. The strategy includes fielding eight demining companies, four mine detecting dog teams, and mechanical mine clearing machinery. Yemen has not only maintained its original commitment, but exceeded all expectations of its original pledge to demine itself. The Republic of Yemen is well on its way to meeting its ultimate goal of a mine safe nation. However, the nation cannot do it alone—continued donor support is imperative.

**All photos courtesy of CENTCOM*

Biography

Commander Holly is a qualified Navy SEAL with six years' experience in EOD detachments. In 1999 he was assigned as the U.S. Navy Central Command's program manager for the Republic of Yemen HD effort. He holds a degree in Environmental Management from the University of LaVern in California.

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