

FEATURE

ACHIEVING PSSM THROUGH CIVIL SOCIETY AND MILITARY COOPERATION

by Lee Moroney [Golden West Humanitarian Foundation]

The core focus of physical security and stockpile management (PSSM) is twofold: mitigate the risk of unplanned explosions at munitions sites (UEMS) that could have drastic humanitarian consequences, and secure stockpiles from illicit diversion and munition theft that could fuel growing insurgencies, terrorist events, and civil conflict by state and nonstate actors worldwide. These areas of concern increase the risks associated with national and regional stability. Increasing PSSM helps professionalize a state's military and security forces, which builds confidence and strengthens security measures between security forces, the civilian population, and its regional neighbors.

Previously a focus area of military-to-military support, civil society—through donors, international nongovernmental organizations (INGO), and international organizations—have become more involved



Typical storage conditions before reorganization within the Explosive Store House (ESH).
All photos courtesy of Golden West Humanitarian Foundation.



Inspection of ammunition in the Ammunition Processing Area: A typical condition of a propellant charge degrading over time, which results in the ammunition being unserviceable and in need of disposal.

in directly assisting with states' security forces in effective ammunition stockpile management processes. Cooperation between civil society and the traditional owners of mine action (national mine action centers) has grown over the past two decades, yet civil society's support for a military role outside the five traditional pillars of humanitarian mine action (HMA) is still a challenge. Cambodia is no different in this respect, and Golden West has cooperated with the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) for two years now in PSSM best practice development. There continues to be support for mitigating Cambodia's extensive landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination, both by donors and organizations focused on clearance and land release; however, little focus was placed on the legacies associated with the ammunition that was stockpiled until 2007–2009 when a German organization, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), conducted a project that addressed PSSM in Cambodia.

Program sustainability is necessary for PSSM programs to be successful. While Cambodia effectively had no ammunition stockpile or lifecycle-management practices in place, GIZ conducted training and introduced standard operating procedures (SOP). However, these practices were not followed once the program ended. Since then, International Ammunition Technical Guidelines (IATG) were developed in 2011 to allow for a standardized structural approach to PSSM. There are many elements to consider when creating a sustainable program; however, long-term strategies of support are among the most proven.



The Ammunition Processing Area, constructed with funds from the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA), enables ammunition to be safely inspected in a controlled environment to enable RCAF to account for ammunition by its condition (serviceable or unserviceable). Golden West provided training to RCAF to allow for safe inspection and conditioning of its stockpiles.

Through the Explosive Harvesting Program (EHP) in Cambodia, Golden West provided charges via the Explosive Harvesting System (EHS) and was able to readdress this gap in capacity support, as Golden West was already known to the RCAF. It took time for the interlinked and complex activities of a full, PSSM capacity-development program to be accepted by the RCAF due to civil society being engaged in what is traditionally and culturally seen as a sensitive area. When developing civil society-military relationships, trust is built over time, something that must be understood by all stakeholders to secure a sustainable and solid PSSM program. While the EHP program began in 2005, Golden West's role expanded in 2015, with the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) as the donor, to consolidate already-identified, unserviceable, and surplus munitions from lesser secure storage areas into a Central Ammunition Depot (CAD). Munitions not appropriate for processing into charges for use by the HMA community were destroyed as part of the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC) disposal operation that is integral to the EHP.

Through stockpile reduction, Golden West support evolved to incorporate the capacity development components of training, in accordance with the norms of international best practices. Refresher training on the basic principles of munition storage and transport was necessary, which allowed Golden West to identify the key personalities within the regional commands who would continue to be assisted in their technical development.

In the author's experience, this bottom-up approach is not always appropriate. However, this first-aid fix was the most appropriate

start for the Golden West project in continuing to build trust while simultaneously assessing the requirements and implementing elements of PSSM. This fluid strategy for project development continues to build trust and develop cooperation in what is normally viewed by militaries as a sensitive area, as previously mentioned.

It's all About the Approach

The sensitivity issue is something that Golden West addressed from the start. Many within HMA are ex-military, and all participants recognized the right of a nation state to have the tools to defend its sovereignty. This includes weapons and ammunition that militaries require to function as intended. Rather than pressuring countries into giving civil society access to ammunition depots so that civil society can identify unserviceable ammunition and poor stockpile management practices, the most efficient approach is to have countries enhance the capacity of their appropriate staff at all levels. This results in staff who can identify and account for both serviceable and unserviceable munitions, and allows for efficient stockpile destruction planning. This also facilitates the cycle of disposal through efficient, munition lifecycle-management practices.

The obvious by-product of this approach is that the RCAF is able to empirically identify and accurately account for unserviceable ammunition within military regions that they can then plan to incorporate into a disposal plan. In Cambodia, they continue to feed ammunition into the EHP and the country-wide HMA program with ongoing donor support.

Once up to a sustainable level, the RCAF will utilize its skill sets in order to properly manage its inspection and proofing cycles.



Basic items such as this locally designed and produced cage pallet help with safe movement of loose boxes of ammunition, where items such as banding equipment are not viable in low-income countries as a sustainable solution.



Members of the Cambodian PSSM team, composed of members from the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces, the Ministry of National Defense, and Golden West.

Ammunition will always age and become unserviceable. By ensuring adherence to lifecycle-management principles, they will be able to continue to reduce stockpiles of unserviceable ammunition and increase the safety of current, serviceable stockpiles.

Benefits take time to identify at the national level, and the continual support by donors for the long-term vision is important in supporting these principles. Civil society is well placed to provide momentum and contribute to this movement. Once support and assistance is at an acceptable and achievable level—with the development and adoption of doctrine, policies, strategy, procedures, and a sustainable training program and curriculum—the intent is then that this norm will be naturally adopted as an integral and essential part of the defense planning and budgeting. Full national ownership and a more appropriate part of the national budget can then be allocated for adequate ammunition management practices. With time, patience, and focus, PSSM cooperation between civil society and militaries is achievable. ©



An RCAF technical officer undergoing testing on box marking identification. Correct and appropriate packaging and marking are integral to safe storage, identification, and accountability of ammunition. The availability of original or adequate packaging for ammunition and the appropriate basic markings continues to be challenging in countries with stockpiles of legacy ammunition left over from past conflicts.



RCAF officers conduct group work as part of the Golden West PSSM Training in Depot Management Planning for allocating units of space for the safe storage of ammunition in accordance with explosive limits within their buildings and depots.

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