Destruction of Cluster Munitions in Moldova

Colin King
C. King Associates, Ltd.

Follow this and additional works at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal

Part of the Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol14/iss3/4

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Conventional Weapons Destruction by an authorized editor of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.
the village and enable further development projects to begin. Brigadier General Nicholson stressed that residents and local leadership needed to step up and take control of Now Zad or risk the town being returned to the Taliban. As a result of the shura, close coordination and planning commenced between the Marines, PM/WRA, U.S. Embassy, United Nations Mine Action Coordination Center for Afghanistan, local leadership and the NGOs.

Vital to the NGOs and the leaders of Now Zad were assurances of security from Task Force Leatherneck—security that was not viable, but effective. What eventually materialized was a collaborative effort for a $1.8 million project with three of the five NGOs (Mine Clearing Network, PM/WRA, U.S. Embassy, U.S. Marine Corps) where planning commenced between the agencies and organizations providing relief and development. The Marine Corps’ approach to counterinsurgency stresses building this confidence through close coordination and partnering with local forces, government officials and the citizens of the areas for which they are responsible. In order to provide relief and development, quickly, the time between hold and build must be as short as possible. Many times, due to combat operations recently concluding, this time is delayed in order to clear the area of explosive remnants of war. This delay could potentially result in a loss of confidence by the local communities in the forces operating in their area. CBD is yet another way for the United States to ensure that the “bridge” from hold to build is as short as possible.  

For some countries affected by cluster munitions, the obligations to demilitarize that accompany ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions may appear daunting. In 2009, however, Norwegian People’s Aid undertook a pilot project in Moldova to find a cheaper, more efficient alternative-disposal method. They discovered that not only can destruction of cluster munitions be done more effectively, but also that by using locally administered programs, international organizations can promote capacity building and increased employment while also bolstering national pride and commitment to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

by Colin King [ C King Associates, Ltd. ]

D uring the Oslo Process, it became clear that several nations were concerned about their obligations to destroy cluster munition stockpiles under Article 3 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. In fact, it soon became apparent that this might be a significant obstacle for signing or ratification for some countries. Industrial demilitarization plants exist in several developed nations; however, costs are high, and most are running at or near capacity. Even if the resources were available, it would be un economical for an industrial unit to gear up for the disposal of small quantities of cluster munitions, especially if these were unusual types. A new process would involve a great deal of additional effort, including research on the ammunition, development of a new procedure, fabricating or adapting existing machinery, retraining the workforce, development of adequate quality control measures and so forth.

The need for another option led Norwegian People’s Aid to examine alternative-disposal methods. Since several nations were concerned about their obligations to destroy cluster munition stockpiles under Article 3 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions,1 here, Moldova was among a small number of delegations that approached NPA to express an interest in a pilot project. An NPA assessment team visited Moldova in October 2009 and identified five types of Russian cluster bomb and submunition payloads in the Moldovan inventory. The submunitions included three types of anti-armor bomblets (PTAB-2.5, PTAB-2.5M and PTAB-2.5K) and two types of fragmentation bomblets (AO-1SCH and AO-2.5RT). Externally, the bombs were in reasonably good condition, suggesting that the submunitions would be well preserved.

Unloading of cluster bombs. The NPA team conducted all work at a Bulboaca military

Colo. Yuri Escalante, USMC is the Commanding Officer of Combat Logistics Regiment-2 in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Prior to taking command, he was the Deputy Director of the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State. More information about the U.S. role in conventional weapons destruction can be found at http://state.gov/t/pm/wra.

Col. Yuri Escalante
Col. United States Marine Corps
Commanding Officer
Combat Logistics Regiment-2
PSC Box 20132
Camp Lejeune, NC 28542
Tel: +1 910 450 6634
E-mail: yuri.escalante@usmc.mil

Col. Yuri Escalante, USMC is the Commanding Officer of Combat Logistics Regiment-2 in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Prior to taking command, he was the Deputy Director of the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State. More information about the U.S. role in conventional weapons destruction can be found at http://state.gov/t/pm/wra.

Col. Yuri Escalante
Col. United States Marine Corps
Commanding Officer
Combat Logistics Regiment-2
PSC Box 20132
Camp Lejeune, NC 28542
Tel: +1 910 450 6634
E-mail: yuri.escalante@usmc.mil

Published by JMU Scholarly Commons, 2020

1 The Moldova Pilot Program

King: Destruction of Cluster Munitions in Moldova

Destruction of Cluster Munitions in Moldova

For some countries affected by cluster munitions, the obligations to demilitarize that accompany ratification of the Convention on Cluster Munitions may appear daunting. In 2009, however, Norwegian People’s Aid undertook a pilot project in Moldova to find a cheaper, more efficient alternative-disposal method. They discovered that not only can destruction of cluster munitions be done more effectively, but also that by using locally administered programs, international organizations can promote capacity building and increased employment while also bolstering national pride and commitment to the Convention on Cluster Munitions.

by Colin King [ C King Associates, Ltd. ]

D uring the Oslo Process, it became clear that several nations were concerned about their obligations to destroy cluster munition stockpiles under Article 3 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions. In fact, it soon became apparent that this might be a significant obstacle for signing or ratification for some countries. Industrial demilitarization plants exist in several developed nations; however, costs are high, and most are running at or near capacity. Even if the resources were available, it would be un economical for an industrial unit to gear up for the disposal of small quantities of cluster munitions, especially if these were unusual types. A new process would involve a great deal of additional effort, including research on the ammunition, development of a new procedure, fabricating or adapting existing machinery, retraining the workforce, development of adequate quality control measures and so forth.

The need for another option led Norwegian People’s Aid to examine alternative-disposal methods. Since several nations were concerned about their obligations to destroy cluster munition stockpiles under Article 3 of the Convention on Cluster Munitions,1 here, Moldova was among a small number of delegations that approached NPA to express an interest in a pilot project. An NPA assessment team visited Moldova in October 2009 and identified five types of Russian cluster bomb and submunition payloads in the Moldovan inventory. The submunitions included three types of anti-armor bomblets (PTAB-2.5, PTAB-2.5M and PTAB-2.5K) and two types of fragmentation bomblets (AO-1SCH and AO-2.5RT). Externally, the bombs were in reasonably good condition, suggesting that the submunitions would be well preserved.

Unloading of cluster bombs. The NPA team conducted all work at a Bulboaca military
Unexploded submunitions tend to be “kicked out.” Bomb demolition of cluster munitions is notoriously difficult, as removing the technique, the Moldovan soldiers successfully loaded once the tail section was removed. After refin-
assembly was carried out in two adjacent tents, despite the NPA team used the second tent for submunition disassembly.
The two types of bomb containers, RBK-250 and RBK-500, were similar in structure and were easily unloaded once the tail section was removed. After refin-
sanitary destruction program.

Submunition disassembly. One of the primary objectives was to create simple, practical processes to remove bomblet fuzes, thereby exposing the explosive filling in order to make subsequent demolition simple and safe. This objective was achieved with four out of the five sub-

Submunition disassembly. One of the primary objectives was to create simple, practical processes to remove bomblet fuzes, thereby exposing the explosive filling in order to make subsequent demolition simple and safe. This objective was achieved with four out of the five sub-

Explosive demolition. Successful explosive demo-
lution of cluster munitions is notoriously difficult, as unexploded submunitions tend to be “kicked out.” Bom-

AO-15Ch bomblet bodies after the explosive charge has been burned out.

Burning. Burning has a number of potential advan-
tages for bomblet destruction, including avoidance of the noise and shock involved in demolition, elimination of the need for large stocks of high explosives, minimizing metallic contamination, and the retention of steel scrap. Burning normally requires detonator extraction and exposure of the main explosive filling, which was easily achieved in a single step by removal of the fuze-assembly from all of the bomblet types, except for the AO-

Conclusions

The research-and-development phase of Moldova’s pilot program was a great success despite extreme weather, a difficult operating en-
vironment and a restricted time frame. The operation confirmed that regional demilitarization programs involving Russian cluster bombs re-
quire minimal resources and could, therefore, be implemented anywhere. As an unexpected bonus, Mold-

Moldovan soldiers, under supervision, removing the tail from an RBK-200 cluster bomb. All photos courtesy of the author.