July 2009

‘Mine-free’ Countries of Central/South America: Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Suriname

Country Profile
CISR

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

Part of the Defense and Security Studies Commons, Emergency and Disaster Management Commons, Other Public Affairs, Public Policy and Public Administration Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
Available at: http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/cisr-journal/vol13/iss1/36

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.
Uzbekistan Ammunition Depot Explosion Cleanup: U.S. DoD Support

A recent ammunition explosion in Kagan, Uzbekistan, prompted an appeal for international aid. As a result, Lieutenant Colonel Gary Bolos led a team of Explosive Ordinance Disposal Non-Commissioned Officers from the United States Department of Defense into Uzbekistan to deliver equipment and train the Uzbek Army on proper detection and removal of the ammunition with a limited budget and restricted schedule.

by Matthew Voegel [Center for International Stabilization and Recovery]

On 21 July 2008, U.S. Department of State representatives in the former Soviet satellite nation located within Central Asia, contacted U.S. Army Central Command, the Army Service Component of Central Command. USAREC received an e-mail including an itemized request from the Uzbekistan Ministry of Defense for three types of equipment: landmine detectors, underwater metal detectors and bomb suits.1 Two weeks prior, on 10 July 2008, two explosions at an Uzbek Army base and ammunition depot had caused 150 million rounds of various ammunition to scatter over an eight-mile radius (12 kilometers) from the epicenter of the blast.2 The ammunition depot was located outside the city of Bukhara in the small town of Kagan. Bukhara, which was located along the historically significant Silk Road during ancient times, was once one of the largest commercial centers not only in Central Asia, but in the world.3

Government Response

In order to control the situation, the government of Uzbekistan declared that the incident was indeed a “disaster,” thus giving it grounds to start [shifting] into an unstable form. Then you’re dealing with a lot of chemical [is experiencing dramatic temperature change], it’s going to pretty hot [quickly] you have your extremes in weather. Anytime a lot of open storage … In that region, you can come from extreme cold to fairly hot [quickly] you have your extremes in weather. Anytime a lot of open storage … In that region, you can come from extreme cold to extremely hot [quickly] you have your extremes in weather. Anytime a lot of open storage … In that region, you can come from extreme cold to extremely hot [quickly] you have your extremes in weather. Anytime a lot of open storage … In that region, you can come from extreme cold to extremely hot [quickly] you have your extremes in weather.

Bolos, a serviceman of 23 years and an Army EOD Officer since 1996, was on-site in the town of Kagan by early August with ARCENT.1 In addition to the equipment, USAREC was tasked with providing requisite training on the equipment for Uzbek military personnel to enable them to deal with their newfound UXO situation. This entire operation was carried out under the direction and supervision of Lieutenant Colonel Gary Bolos.

Background

During the 1980s, the military base at Kagan served as a large Soviet Army supply station for troops invading Afghanistan. U.S. records show that in 1988, the U.S. gave the Uzbek military included the requested landmine detectors and underwater detectors but not the bomb suits.4 Even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the independence of Uzbekistan, these stockpiles stayed within the facility at Kagan in an open setting, allowing them to become weather-affected. With age and exposure to varying temperatures, these munitions became unstable, and since they were not inspected, under surveillance or even marked properly, they could not be separated and neutralized.

Analyzing the Situation

On the third of August I was actually on the ground, working as [part of the] Pre-Deployment Site Survey, basically so I could assess what I really needed team-wise,” Bolos says. LTC Derber, promoted from the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent and U.S. Department of State, as well as the Uzbekistan Cabinet of Ministers of Defense and Uzbekistan South West Regional Commander, accompanied Bolos after the assessment. Bolos was back in Uzbekistan on 21 August with a shipment of the requested equipment and a team of four U.S. Army and Navy EOD Non-Commissioned Officers (two from each branch) to assist with the training that would follow.

Challenges of Operation

The training that Bolos and his team delivered the group of 300 Uzbek soldiers initially seemed like a huge challenge. In fact, while on the Pre-Deployment Site survey, Bolos was not allowed access into the military depot, but relegated to the outside of the perimeter. This restriction made it hard for him to assess the degree of damage caused by the explosion and to find inactive munitions to facilitate the training on the metal detectors. Instead, Bolos and his team tried to find examples of the UXO found near the explosion site. “I was able to capture some of the munitions that were scattered around the outside of the perimeter, so I could see what they were looking for.” He then asked the Uzbeks to provide samples of the munitions involved in the explosion to allow his team to demonstrate how the detectors would work.

A second challenge the team faced was the language barrier. According to Bolos, he had requested the assistance of a Russian interpreter, which seemed like a good choice considering that Uzbekistan was under Russian and then Soviet control for more than a century, but unfortunately this did not work as well as he expected. “We discovered it’s better to have a person with an Uzbek dialect that speaks Uzbekistan versus Russian because some of the younger generation didn’t understand Russian,” he remarked. “We were fortunate [that] one of our interpreters spoke the Uzbek language. He did the majority of our translations.”

Probably the largest obstacle facing Bolos and his team was one outside of his control: time. This impediment was mostly due to the fact that the visas allowing them to stay in the country expired between 30 August and 1 September. Considering that the team arrived with the equipment on 21 August, their available time frame to fully train more than 300 Uzbek soldiers was just seven days. “As if that weren’t difficult enough, the team also had to find a classroom that could accommodate 30 or more personnel and had electricity for a laptop and projector, locate an area large enough to construct 10 metal detector practice held lanes, and identify various sized fragments of UXO to use as training aids.

Training the Trainer

With that in mind, Bolos formulated a strategy that would keep the training on schedule. “We used a three-pronged approach,” Bolos says. “First, instructions were

*Notes: numbers in the field are from the journal of ERW and mine action 1/2000; 1/3.1

Published by JMU Scholarly Commons, 2009

13.1 summer 2009 | the journal of ERW and mine action | notes from the field | 91
the unit. This approach was evident when Uzbek soldiers as they were able to train earlier than the time allotted to them. The trainer” technique and methodology, Bolos says. “We were afforded the opportunity to share information and access expertise on many components of mine action in a French-language setting. The meeting was attended by officials from 14 African French-speaking countries actively involved in reducing the impact of mines and ERW in their territories, and representatives from international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and National Community of West African States.

Another key component of GICHD’s Franco-Phone program is the provision of mine-action resources in French. This includes an online library of mine-action documents, the GICHD by officials from 14 African French-speaking countries actively involved in reducing the impact of mines and ERW in their territories, and representatives from international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and National Community of West African States. The meeting, hosted by the United Nations Mine Action Team chaired the meeting, and topics discussed included transition of programs to national ownership, linking mine action to development, victim surveillance and a number of technical issues. A full report of the meeting is available at E-Mine Web site: www.minaction.org.

Recent Publications

Due to the growing concern caused by accidental explosions at ammunition storage facilities, the GICHD updated a previous study and released 4 Guide to Ammunition Storage in November 2008. Over the past eight years, available records show that explosions have killed or injured thousands of people. In 2008 alone, explosions in Albania, Bulgaria, Iran, Iraq, Ukraine and Uzbekistan reportedly caused hundreds of casualties and scattered munitions over many square kilometers of previously safe land. This publication identifies and promotes good practice in the safe storage of ammunition and contributes to international efforts to address this important issue.

A revised and updated version of the Guide to Cluster Munitions was recently launched at the Conference on the Destruction of Cluster Munitions, presented by the German and Norwegian governments with support from the GICHD in Berlin in late June 2009. Additional, the GICHD released A Mechanical Demining Handbook in early July, providing practical advice on the management and tasking of machines to support various demining activities. The concept of “relaying suspect land,” rather than just focusing on “clearance,” has been an important issue for the GICHD for the past couple of years, and we are pleased to see the theme for the next issue of The Journal of ERW and Mine Action.

The GICHD is also continuing research into various new technical survey methods, and this information will be published later in 2009. In conjunction with this, the GICHD has provided practical advice and assistance to mine affected countries in the development of land release policies and processes. These have included, among others, Angola, Cambodia, Chad, Laos and Mozambique.

Geneva Diary: Report from the GICHD

by Ian Mansfield

The GICHD recently organized an African Francophone Conference on demining in Bonn and provided technical input for the recent Conference on Cluster Munitions. In addition, GICHD published technical guides related to road clearance, safe ammunition storage and cluster munitions.

Francophone Meeting in the Republic of Benin

The first African Francophone seminar on mine action and explosives was held in Benin from 20–22 October 2008 in Cotonou, Benin. The meeting, hosted by the government of Benin, was organized by the GICHD in collaboration with the Centre de Préfiguration aux Actions-Port conflit- touchantes de Déminage et Dépouillement and was financially supported by the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie and the government of Switzerland. This first meeting was specifically planned as a forum for the exchange of experiences. Participants benefited from the opportunity to share information and access expertise on many components of mine action in a French-language setting. The meeting was attended by officials from 14 African French-speaking countries actively involved in reducing the impact of mines and ERW in their territories, and representatives from international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and National Community of West African States.

Another key component of GICHD’s Franco-Phone program is the provision of mine-action resources in French. This includes an online library of mine-action documents, the GICHD by officials from 14 African French-speaking countries actively involved in reducing the impact of mines and ERW in their territories, and representatives from international and regional organizations such as the United Nations and National Community of West African States. The meeting, hosted by the United Nations Mine Action Team chaired the meeting, and topics discussed included transition of programs to national ownership, linking mine action to development, victim surveillance and a number of technical issues. A full report of the meeting is available at E-Mine Web site: www.minaction.org.

Recent Publications

Due to the growing concern caused by accidental explosions at ammunition storage facilities, the GICHD updated a previous study and released 4 Guide to Ammunition Storage in November 2008. Over the past eight years, available records show that explosions have killed or injured thousands of people. In 2008 alone, explosions in Albania, Bulgaria, Iran, Iraq, Ukraine and Uzbekistan reportedly caused hundreds of casualties and scattered munitions over many square kilometers of previously safe land. This publication identifies and promotes good practice in the safe storage of ammunition and contributes to international efforts to address this important issue.

A revised and updated version of the Guide to Cluster Munitions was recently launched at the Conference on the Destruction of Cluster Munitions, presented by the German and Norwegian governments with support from the GICHD in Berlin in late June 2009. Additionally, the GICHD released A Mechanical Demining Handbook in early July, providing practical advice on the management and tasking of machines to support various demining activities. The concept of “relaying suspect land,” rather than just focusing on “clearance,” has been an important issue for the GICHD for the past couple of years, and we are pleased to see the theme for the next issue of The Journal of ERW and Mine Action.

The GICHD is also continuing research into various new technical survey methods, and this information will be published later in 2009. In conjunction with this, the GICHD has provided practical advice and assistance to mine affected countries in the development of land release policies and processes. These have included, among others, Angola, Cambodia, Chad, Laos and Mozambique.

See Endnotes, Page 134