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

Country Profile

Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at JMU (CISR)

Follow this and additional works at: https://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


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.
O

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 Ordnance 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]

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 training on the metal detectors. Instead, Bolos and his team tried to find examples of 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 give them what they were looking for.” Then he asked the Uzbek military to provide samples of the munitions involved in the explosion to allow his team to demonstrate how the detectors would work.

Another 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 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 Uzbekistani 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 wasn’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 proxy, locate an area large enough to train more than 300 soldiers with this equipment, and train the 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, a serviceman of 23 years and an Army EOD Officer since 1985. Although he worked with the U.S. Army Service Component of Central Command, USARCENT received the requested equipment and a team of four U.S. Army personnel to enable them to deal with their newfound UXO situation.

In addition to the equipment, USARCENT was tasked in obtaining the equipment and training. USARCENT was given full responsibility in obtaining the area. The Department of State, in conjunction with its embassies in Uzbekistan, contacted the U.S. Department of Defense to assist in obtaining adequate equipment and the necessary training to neutralize the area. The Department of State, as well as the Uzbekistan Ministry 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

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 appeal for foreign aid. With that, the Uzbek-Ministry of Defense looked to the Department of State for help. Uzbekistan requested U.S. assistance in obtaining adequate equipment and the necessary training to dispose of the massive amounts of unexploded ordnance that contaminate the area. The Department of State, in conjunction with its embassy in Uzbekistan, contacted the U.S. Department of Defense to assist in obtaining the equipment and training. USARCENT was tasked with providing requisite training on the equipment for the 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.

Bolos, a serviceman of 23 years and an Army EOD Officer since 1985, was on site in the town of Kagan by early August with USARCENT Country Desk Officer Central Asia/South Asia Branch Chief LTC Mark Derber. “[The weapons are not stored properly],” says Bolos. “There is a lot of open storage — in that region, you can come from extreme cold to pretty hot [quickly]; you have your extremes in weather. Anytime a chemical weapon experiences dramatic temperature change, it’s going to start [dissolving] into an unstable form. Then you’re dealing with a lot of unstable munitions.”

The explosion, which took place at the Kagan Ammunition Depot, resulted in the destruction of a large stockpile of ammunition. The majority of the ordnance, including large quantities of rockets, was not inspected and destroyed properly, so it became weather affects. 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.

According to a publication produced by the Parliamentary Forum on Small Arms and Light Weapons, these combined factors can lead to the spontaneous ignition of weapons, and it is inevitable for certain propel-lant types. Inside a single facility, these spontaneous fires can lead to explosions, eventuallyignitingotherstockpilesinthesurroundingarea. Such explosions have the potential to last longer than a few hours, preventing the fire from being extinguished while causing significant damage to the surrounding area.

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

Published by JMU Scholarly Commons, 2009

13.1.1 summer 2009 | the journal of ERW and mine action | notes from the field | 91
Uzbek soldiers as they were now able to train the EOD Military Training Team not only saved earlier than the time allotted to them. and his crew effectively trained all of the Uzbek military personnel by 28 August; a whole day of "the trainer" technique and methodology, Bolos properly trained and comfortable with the equipment and they were very professional. Ultimately, Bolos and his team had a considerable impact on the Uzbek soldiers. Through training military personnel how to perform EOD operations, the U.S. has provided Uzbekistan with a sustainable method for addressing the threat of neutral and removal of dangerous UXO. Since his last trip to Central Asia, Bolos has accepted a new assignment at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, assuming command of an EOD Battalion, but he still has fond memories of his trips to the area. "They took care of us," Bolos says. "We were afforded the opportunity to experience their culture and history during our stay."