Iraq Facing the Legacy of Landmines and Explosive Remnants of War

Salomon Schreuder

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

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In this article, the describe the recent history and current state of mine-action efforts in Iraq. He argues for a renewed focus on these issues and for a comprehensive approach, linking other humanitarian efforts with mine action.

by Solamon Schreuder [United Nations Development Programme]
act operators, although there are some areas where mine-action activities can be executed effectively, such as in the Kurdish region and deep rural areas of Basra governorate, known as one of the most dangerous governorates in Iraq. It is hoped the security situation will improve to expand mine-action activities to the rest of the country.

The Way Forward

U.N. agencies have been taking extra caution in planning activities in recent years due to limited funding; however, it is slowly becoming a trend to link mine action with other development projects to maximize the effectiveness of available funding. For instance, MRE activities have been linked with area-based interventions and other activities under child protection, while mine clearance is linked with agricultural development in southern Iraq. The country still requires mine-action support from the international community—support that will put a premium on national ownership, sustainability, and integrating mine action into other humanitarian and development activities. This emphasis means that technical advisory support needs to be complemented with management capacity-building strategies. This can be provided in tandem with the obligations of the Ottawa Convention. It is an encouraging indication that on 15 August 2007, Iraq acceded to the Ottawa Convention, becoming the 155th State Party. This action is expected to encourage the international community to fund urgently needed support.

The Convention entered into force 1 February 2008, with Iraq’s initial transparency report required under Article 7 to be submitted no later than 1 July 2008. The deadlines for the destruction of stockpiles will be 1 February 2012 and the deadline for the destruction of all anti-personnel mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control is 1 February 2018.

Counternarratives

In Iraq the destructive and inhumane legacy of mines and ERW deserves stronger advocacy and action. Amidst a surge of foreign assistance in demining and reconstruction, real attention should be paid to mine/ERW contamination prevailing in the country. Thousands of victims, especially those who have been maimed and severely disabiled—categorised as the most vulnerable patients—need considerable medical assistance and socioeconomic recovery support. Mine action should be on the same agenda as the rest of reconstruction and development because mine action is an enabling action for livelihood, safe access to healthcare and schools, reconstruction and humanitarian activities.

As a representative of UNDP, we would like to underscore our deep appreciation for the support from donors thus far to help save the lives and livelihood of innocent Iraqi civilians.

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by Esma Al-Samarai and Stephen Bryant [ Norwegian People’s Aid ]

Jordan signed the Ottawa Convention 1 in 1999 and is working to comply with the regulations by the May 2009 deadline. Jordan has enlisted Norwegian People’s Aid to help the Royal Engineering Corps meet its deadline. Surveys have been completed and suspected hazardous areas have been significantly reduced. NPA is continuing to demine areas with the help of mine-detecting dogs and a MineWolf machine. The overall goal is to clear the land to allow agriculture and industry to return to areas currently inaccessible due to the threat of landmines.

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The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is the only mine-affected country among its neighbours to ratify the Ottawa Convention, which went into effect 1 May 1999. Landmines lie along the borders with Israel, in Wadi Araba, and Syria, in the northern region, and there is landmine/unclearanced existence contamination in the Jordan Valley. Jordan has taken ownership of the problem. Complying with the Convention is seen as a critical stage in strengthening relations in the Middle East because Jordan will be an example to other countries in the region facing similar problems. In April 2002, His Majesty King Abdullah issued a royal decree establishing the Board of Directors of the National Committee for Demining and Rehabilitation. The NCDR is the primary national mine-action authority responsible for establishing and managing the National Mine Action Programme and ensuring that it is anchored in the overall development goals and strategies of the country. Furthermore, the NCDR makes sure all aspects of mine action are integrated—including mine clearance, mine-risk education, and survivor and victim assistance—as well as coordinates and leads resource mobilisation. Mine-risk education and mine-victim assistance are conducted by many national and international organisations in collaboration with the NCDR.

In September 2005, NPA was asked to assist the NCDR in clearing the Wadi Araba region. NPA deployed an assessment mission to Jordan in November 2005. The mission concluded that NPA could contribute to a clearance operation in a cost-effective and timely fashion, utilising both innovative methodology and clearance procedures developed over the past four years in Sri Lanka. The assessment mission confirmed the commitment of the NCDR to combat the mine problem in the country and to support and facilitate NPA in the establishment of a mine-action programme in Jordan. NPA employs 165 people working directly on demining projects.

Demining is conducted by the Royal Engineers Corps and Norwegian People’s Aid. Localised impact on communities is considered moderate to severe by international standards. The minefields act as a barrier to large socioeconomic development projects that would benefit the whole nation.

Situation Analysis: NPA Assisting Jordan

In January 2006, NPA deployed a start-up team to establish the proposed humanitarian mine-action programme. To date, using Jordanian-trained teams and the rake method, the mine-action programme in Jordan has cleared a total of 102,138 square metres (25 acres) and removed 2,829 of 62,724 anti-personnel mines and 6,129 out of 8,421 anti-tank mines. NPA is using mine-detecting dogs for Technical Survey and quality assurance. In addition, the original MineWolf tiller and fail machine is being used for verification of the areas in Wadi Araba.

By invitation from the NCDR, NPA has been further tasked with clearing the last remaining hurdles to Jordan’s efforts to comply with the Mine Ban Convention: contamination in the north along the Syrian border. In addition, NPA is implementing a Landmine Retrofit Survey to quantify the impact. The NCDR also contracts NPA to provide technical assistance where requested and relevant, and to assist in the development of the national authority.

NPA’s Goals

Working in cooperation with the NCDR, NPA’s main goal is to enhance the opportunity and ability of individuals and communities to control their own lives. NPA’s immediate goal is to assist and ensure