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Tajikistan Mine Action Programme

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The Tajikistan Mine Action Centre is responsible for all mine-action-related programs in the country. The author details Tajikistan's landmine problems and provides a report on TMAC's progress in various aspects of mine action as well as its goals for future mine-related operations.

by Jonnahmad Rajabov  
[Tajikistan Mine Action Centre]

Both sides in Tajikistan's five-year civil war in the 1990s used ant-personnel mines and many of these weapons remain in place in the country's central area. Uzbek forces laid APAs along their border with Tajikistan and some remain in disputed territory. Minesfields also exist along the border with Afghanistan in land recently handed over to Tajik sovereignty by Russia. Nearly 10 years after the end of the civil war, landmines continue to create obstacles for accessing grazing and agricultural land in Tajikistan and cause economic hardship for its people. The problem of landmines and explosive remnants of war contributes to human suffering and livestock loss.

The landmine issue continues to be a source of concern for the government of Tajikistan and demining remains vitally important to national development plans. Foreign-manufactured landmines kill, maim and threaten Tajiks who are living in the poorer areas of their own country. Landmines were placed by the Soviet Union, Russian forces (following Tajik independence), the Tajiks themselves, and Uzbek forces along Uzbek-Tajik borders. Areas on the Afghan and Uzbek borders and former battlefields in the central region continue to present a hazard to the rural poor who have to live with the threat of explosive remnants of war as part of their daily lives.

Tajikistan's national government has adopted a long-term strategic plan, one that is linked to future mine-action goals and national development plans. The government’s commitment to mine-action initiatives is visible and increasing. Tajikistan has been a State Party of the Ottawa Convention since 1 April 2000, and the government is also a signatory of Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Conventional Weapons.

Humanitarian Impact of AP Mines and UXO

Landmines and items of unexploded ordnance appeared in the central part of Tajikistan during the civil war years. Both sides of the conflict used ant-personnel mines and other munitions along the Tajik-Uzbek and Tajik-Afghan borders. The central region incorporates the Taviltdara area and the Rasht Valley, as well as parts of the Gorno-Badakhshan region. Landmines, UXO and other remnants of war continue to be a hazard for the people in this region.

Along some parts of the Tajik border with Afghanistan, Russian forces and border troops laid and maintained mines to counter cross-border infiltration and for self-protection. In 2005, Russian forces conducted the hand-over process to Tajik colleagues. Mine records were also provided. Uzbek forces laid APs along the border with Tajikistan, and the first deaths and injuries involving civilians in this border area were reported in August 1999. Seven-two deaths and 85 injuries have occurred in these communities, and in excess of 2,000 head of livestock have been lost. Since 1992, 239 people have been injured and 258 killed as the result of mine accidents in Tajikistan. Children account for 20 percent of these casualties.

The problem of mine contamination seriously affects the civil population who are engaged in the daily activities of growing food, gathering and activities related to normal rural life. Landmines also adversely affect agricultural development, the environment and the economy of the country. Almost all the inhabitants within at-risk communities have received mine-risk education and awareness training. Still, economic imperatives drive local populations to continue visiting hazardous areas, which often results in death and injury.

Tajikistan Mine Action Centre

On 20 June 2003, the Tajik government signed an agreement with the United Nations Development Programme called “Support to the Tajikistan National Mine Action Programme,” and the Tajikistan Mine Action Centre was established. The Centre is a governmental structure and is responsible for all mine-action-related issues in Tajikistan. It is also the executive authority of the national Commission on Implementation of International Humanitarian Law.

Planning, Monitoring and Coordinating

TMAC develops mine-action plans (strategic and annual), national standards and other strategic documents related to mine action and submits them to the Commission on the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law for approval. Implementation of the Tajik Mine Action Programme is in accordance with the Mine Action Strategic Five-Year Plan for 2004-08 and the Annual Plan, which CIHL approved on 13 April 2004. TMAC is responsible for coordinating and monitoring national mine-action activities in Tajikistan. Within this framework, TMAC updates the national mine-action plan and undertakes the development, priority selection, planning and coordination of operations. It also prioritizes new tasks, confirms completion of tasks and gives certificates of cleared sites to local authorities. TMAC provides its UNDP and FSD partners with information on mined areas and operations obtained from the Information Management System for Mine Action, as well as on mine incidents and mine survivors.

TMAC maintains a multi-agency database of mine-risk education and training. TMAC’s major partners are the UNDP, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the European Union, the International Committee of the Red Cross; UNICEF, the Tajikistan Red Crescent, representatives of the donor countries in Tajikistan, Fondation Suisse de Déminage, the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining, Ministries of Security, Justice, Interior, Foreign Affairs, Education, Labour and Social Protection, Defence, Health, and Emergency Situations, the State Committee for Protection of the State Border and local executive authorities.

Mine Clearance

In accordance with Article 5 of the Ottawa Convention, each State Party undertakes to destroy or ensure the destruction of all AP mines in mined areas under its jurisdiction or control, as soon as possible but not later than 10 years after the entry into force of the Convention, for Tajikistan this deadline is 1 April 2010. As a signatory to the Convention, Tajikistan embarked on destruction of its stockpiles (3,029 AP mines) on 31 March 2004. The Ministry of Defence, supported by FSD and Suisse de Déminage, undertook the destruction.

On 20 June 2003, the government signed an agreement with FSD. Funding is channelled through the UNDP and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and FSD is now the national survey and mine-clearance partner in Tajikistan, with four survey and three mine-clearance teams. More than 100 mined areas have been identified so far as a result of survey operations.

In 2004, three mined areas were cleared and handed over to local authorities for future use. Since the Technical Survey, a mine clearance started in July 2004, more than 180,000 square metres (44 acres) and more than 2,000 mines and items of UXO have been cleared.

To speed the process of mine clearance, TMAC plans to establish four mine-detecting dog teams. TMAC thinks this issue is very important for the programme and the Centre is looking for donors to fund the project.

Mine-risk Education

The Red Crescent Society of Tajikistan, supported by the ICRC and UNICEF, is undertaking MRE in 14 districts of the country (border areas of the Sugd region, the Rud Vay and Yan, and the Dartau district of the Gorno-Badakhshan region). In August 2005, UNICEF sustained a small, joint pilot project together with the Ministry of Education of Tajikistan. RCST and UNICEF volunteers conduct complementary activities to educate the local population about mine hazards and how to live with landmines.

More than 3,200 large mine-hazard warning signs have been manufactured, of which more than 2,200 were placed in border areas in the Sugd region. The remainder will be installed in the central part of the country. In addition, to provide more information on MRE activities, the U.N. booklet Guideline as to what to do when you find a mine, was translated and 6,000 copies in Tajik and 3,000 copies in Uzbek languages were distributed. More than 22,000 leaflets were issued with appropriate guidelines for distribution by the project’s volunteers, military personnel, local authorities, teachers and active advocates of the programme.

Assistance to Survivors

A project called Assistance to Landmine Survivors, implemented within the framework of cooperation among the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Tajikistan, ICRC, UNDP and RCST, assisted disabled persons, including landmine survivors, by providing prostheses and medical assistance in the national Orthopaedic Centre, Dushanbe.

An income-generation project implemented by RCST in 2005 delivered breeding pairs of goats or sheep to 72 landmine survivors in three mine-affected districts of the Sugd region and three mine-affected districts of the Khujand area. Survivors were trained to establish small-scale livestock enterprises, each returning one offspring to the RCST to re-distribute and expand the project. There is a need to extend this project in the future to provide for all mine survivors.

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News Brief

Rigged Mine Blast Kills 64, Injures More

A powerful landmine blast ripped through a passenger bus loaded with commuters and schoolchildren in northern Sri Lanka in early June. The attack, attributed to the terrorist group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (popularly known as the Tamil Tigers), killed more than 64 people and injured dozens more. Officials said many of the injured were bystanders not on the bus.

The explosion tore through the packed bus in a crowded part of kabithigollewa, a town about 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of the capital, Colombo. Military officials said the blast came from two landmines hanging from a tree and rigged to detonate when signaled from a remote position. Rigging mines above ground on trees and other structures is a common Tiger tactic to reduce blast shielding provided by the ground. The Tigers strongly denied responsibility for the attack after government officials assigned blame to the group. The bomb was the most violent act since a tentative ceasefire in 2002 and brings the divided country even closer to total war.

The Sri Lankan Air Force responded later by bombing several rebel-held areas in other parts of the country. The Tigers are a separatist terrorist group seeking independence of certain areas from Sri Lanka and have been classified as a foreign terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State.

The official delegation of the Republic of Tajikistan took part in the First Review Conference in Nairobi and made a presentation about the process of implementing the Ottawa Convention. TMAC and other government representatives continue to take an active role in international conferences and meetings on the baning of antipersonnel mines. TMAC conducts ongoing training, meetings, liaison and other activities as part of the process of implementation of the Tajikistan Mine Action Programme.

Conclusion

The Civil War of the 1990s created a mine/UXO problem for Tajikistan that is still threatening the daily lives of its citizens a decade later. The Tajikistan Mine Action Centre is remedying the daunting effects this problem has had on the country. TMAC, with international support, has started and will continue to make huge strides in mine/UXO clearance, mine-risk education and victim assistance. See Endnotes, page 112

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by Anki Sjöberg | Geneva Call

No national actors often have more limited military resources than the states against which they fight and, therefore, use landmines, “the poor man’s weapon,” more frequently. As a consequence, the number of NSAs using landmines significantly exceeds the number of states deploying this weapon.

Around 60 NSAs have employed landmines in 24 countries across five geographic regions: sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Middle East/North Africa. In addition to these NSAs, armed groups, which are difficult to identify as belonging to a certain category of ideology or organizational form, have also made frequent use of landmines in a few other countries. Two-thirds of these groups have deployed some type of victim-activated devices. These devices were both factory-made and handmade, indicating NSA involvement in both the transfer and the production of mines.

Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, the National Liberation Army in Colombia, the Abu Sayyaf Group in the Philippines and the Rahanwein Resistance Army in Somalia. Some groups, such as the Party for the Liberation of the Huts People—National Liberation Forces in Burundi and the moman Liberation Forces in Peru, are sporadic users.

In accordance with Article 7 of the Ottawa Convention, it appears that non-signatories are more exposed to NSA mine use than the states against which they fight and, therefore, use landmines, “the poor man’s weapon,” more frequently. As a consequence, the number of NSAs using landmines significantly exceeds the number of states deploying this weapon.

The world’s approximately 200 states have adhered to this international agreement, although they are the states against which they fight and, therefore, use landmines, “the poor man’s weapon,” more frequently. As a consequence, the number of NSAs using landmines significantly exceeds the number of states deploying this weapon.

This report, which builds on the 2004 Geneva Call initial analysis, provides a comprehensive mapping of the use, acquisition, production, transfer and stockpiling of landmines by armed non-state actors through a presentation of individual group profiles and a global analysis.

The report records global occurrences of anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mine planting by NSAs during 2003–2005, whether activated by victims, vehicles or at a distance using command detonation.
mines may be an alternative, and hence, a total ban on AP mines may be possible. There is currently a trend in many conflicts towards increased use of command- detonated mines. However, although command-detonation is clearly preferable from a humanitarian point of view to victim and vehicle activation, this does not constitute a guarantee that civilians and humanitarian actors will not be victimized, as became evident in the กิจกรรมกู้กวาง in Myanmar during 2005.5

Impact of NSA Mine Use

The impact of NSA mine use is in many respects similar to the impact of AP mine use. However, it appears that NSAs mine stocks are more widely dispersed than state mines and non-state actors usually have more control over their deployment in areas where little or no mine action is taking place and where civilians may fear reporting mine incidents. An example of urban mining is given by Rajabov: Tajikistan Mine Action Programme. Around 0 groups globally produced 3.3 million mines, partly used in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. However, it is difficult to distinguish from the impact of other conflicts until the conflict has ended and information becomes available through mine action efforts. The impact of former mine use by NSAs (anti-personnel and anti-vehicle)

Widespread Production and Use of IEDs

Among 40 groups globally produced and used improvised explosive devices between 2003 and 2005.7 This indicates that a strategy that solely targets access to factory- made landmines and explosives is not sufficient. Easy access to materials necessary to manufacture IEDs, as well as knowledge and technology transfer among NSAs, has undermined the effectiveness of international mine action efforts. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in some post-conflict situations there is no need for IEDs or individuals to look for sources of mines since weapons, including mines, are plentiful and easily available, as in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia. Different NSAs have largely transferred to other attacks on IEDs, as well as those deployed by governments, paramilitaries and other factions. The fact that their own combatants are also victimized could be used in negotiations for a mine ban with NSAs. Access to victim assistance for combatants who have suffered mine incidents could also be used as a carrot in negotiations.

Access of IEDs to Mines

There are 30 NSAs used AV mines between 2003 and 2005. As is shown in numerous studies, AV mines triggered by vehicles are also indiscriminate weapons. However, since NSAs in many conflicts largely depend on their weapons, they appear unlikely that many of them would agree to a total ban on AV mines. Nevertheless, some NSAs have expressed interest in banning these weapons.

Need for Prioritization

When engaging NSAs, priorities must be set as to where and how to allocate scarce resources. If humanitarian actors target a group that is a frequent user and manage to neutralize it in the mine ban, the benefit for the population is greater; yet a sporadic user or non-user may be more open to re- negotiating the use of mines, even if it is not a crucial part of their military strategy. The Global Report, by exposing specific characteristics of the NSAs and their mine use, intends to provide a background tool for humanitarian actors to strategize regarding which non-state actors to target and what the appropriate approaches might be. For NSAs, the ultimate aim of conducting advocacy is through direct contact with a group’s leadership. Another way is by disseminating mine-ban information within civil society in order to create a bottom-up pressure on the NSAs to follow the Ottawa process, but also because of the natural perception of landmines as an illegitimate type of weapon.8 NSAs, as well as states, are thus reluctant to admit they are using landmines, in order to or to avoid developing policies that encourage an inclusive approach— including advocacy based on accurate information— could be the key to success for spreading a mine ban among NSAs.

Conclusions

The Global Report clearly demonstrates a need to ban the mine issue with non-state actors. Many NSAs (as well as states) lack the long-term perspective of the consequences of landmine use, and it is therefore crucial for the international community to find channels of communication with NSAs on the AP mine issue. Parties to conflict often use accusations of AP mine use to discredit the other party be- fore the beginning of the negotiations. In such a context, it is important to remain aware of theưngottaion of landmines as a weapon. NSAs, as well as states, are thus reluctant to admit they are using landmines, in order to or to avoid developing policies that encourage an inclusive approach— including advocacy based on accurate information— could be the key to success for spreading a mine ban among NSAs.

This article is drawn from a report pro- duced by Geneva Call, National State Actors and Landmines, Volume I: A Global Report Profiling NSAs and Their Use, Acquisition, Production, Transfer and Stockpiling of Landmines, which was published in November 2005. The report can be downloaded from Geneva Call’s Web site at http://www.genevacall.org. Hard copies can be obtained by writing to info@genevacall.org.

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