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## Iraq

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by Ellie Loveman,  
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Some of the landmines uncovered in recent years date as far back as World War II and many are left over from previous conflicts in Iraq that were meant to isolate or expel citizens from the country. In the 1960s and 1970s, Iraqis utilized landmines against Kurdish mountain fighters to prevent military action by the Kurds. Numerous mines were laid during the Iraq/Iran war of 1980-1988, as well.

Then during the first Gulf War in 1991, the United States emplaced 117,634 self-destructing/self-deactivating landmines in Iraq and Kuwait. However, within months of being laid, these landmines ceased to pose a threat, according to the U.S. Department of State, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement. The 2004 *Landmine Monitor* says landmine production in Iraq continued over the years until the Coalition invasion of 2003. Until then, Iraqi government forces mined all road junctions, riverbeds, water supply points, and oil wells.

Currently, according to the Mines Advisory Group (MAG), Baghdad experiences the greatest level of violence and attacks, while Mosul is rated as the second most violent hotspot in the country. Furthermore, Kirkuk faces problems resulting from the strategic significance of the city, various ethnic groups staking cultural claims on the city and oilfields contained within the region. The northern part of Iraq is most heavily mined and has the highest contamination, particularly areas bordering on Iran.

As of June 2004, 25 different types of landmines had been identified in Iraqi Kurdistan. Although many of the mines were from Italy, other country sources include, but are not limited to, Belgium, Canada, Chile, France, Romania and the United States. In addition, use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has increased since August 2003. Saddam Hussein is believed to have stockpiled mines including wooden box mines and other non-metallic mines that discourage detection, booby-trapped mines, and fragmentation-blast mines that spray shrapnel.

## Casualties

Current casualty information is difficult to obtain because of ongoing security problems, especially in the central and southern parts of the country. The Landmine Impact Survey completed in the northern part of the country in 2002 reported 7,427 injuries and 3,699 casualties since the end of the 1991 Gulf War. The *Landmine Monitor* reports that there were at least 2,189 new mine and UXO casualties in 2003. This large number is mostly due to heavy conflict that arose at the beginning of the year and the returning refugees

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and Iranian Shiite Muslims who attempted to cross the country's heavily mined northern border. During the conflict, the casualty incident rate spiked. For the month of March 2003, as the United Nations Office for Project Services reported to the *Landmine Monitor*, 200 casualties occurred. MAG reports that mine- and UXO-related casualties went down in 2004 to 20 per month in the northern region.

According to the National Mine Action Authority (NMAA) strategic paper of August 2004, communities living within 1 kilometer (0.62 mile) of contamination are high-impact, between 1 and 3 kilometers (0.62-1.86 miles) are medium-impact, and between 3 and 5 kilometers (1.86 to 3.12 miles) are low-impact. Communities farther than 5 kilometers (3.12 miles) from risk areas are considered very low-impacted. The total population affected by UXO in Iraq is approximately 12.3 million and the population affected by landmines is roughly 7.5 million, giving Iraq one of the most mine-affected populations in the world.

In the three northern governorates, the U.N. Mine Action Program conducted an impact survey and demographics of mine-affected persons were then available from those areas. A total of 4,244 settlements fall<sup>3</sup> within 3 kilometers (1.86 miles) of known contamination, which constitutes 43 percent of the population centers in Iraq. Of those surveyed, 6.2 million are under 14 years old, 8.8 million are ages 15-64 and 470,000 are over age 65. These totals mean that about 62 percent of the population of Iraq (16 million people) lives within 5 kilometers (3.12 miles) of known landmine or UXO contamination and faces landmine impact to some degree. Males face the highest risk with 90 percent of the reported incidents involving men or boys. Most of these incidents involved UXO, not landmines.

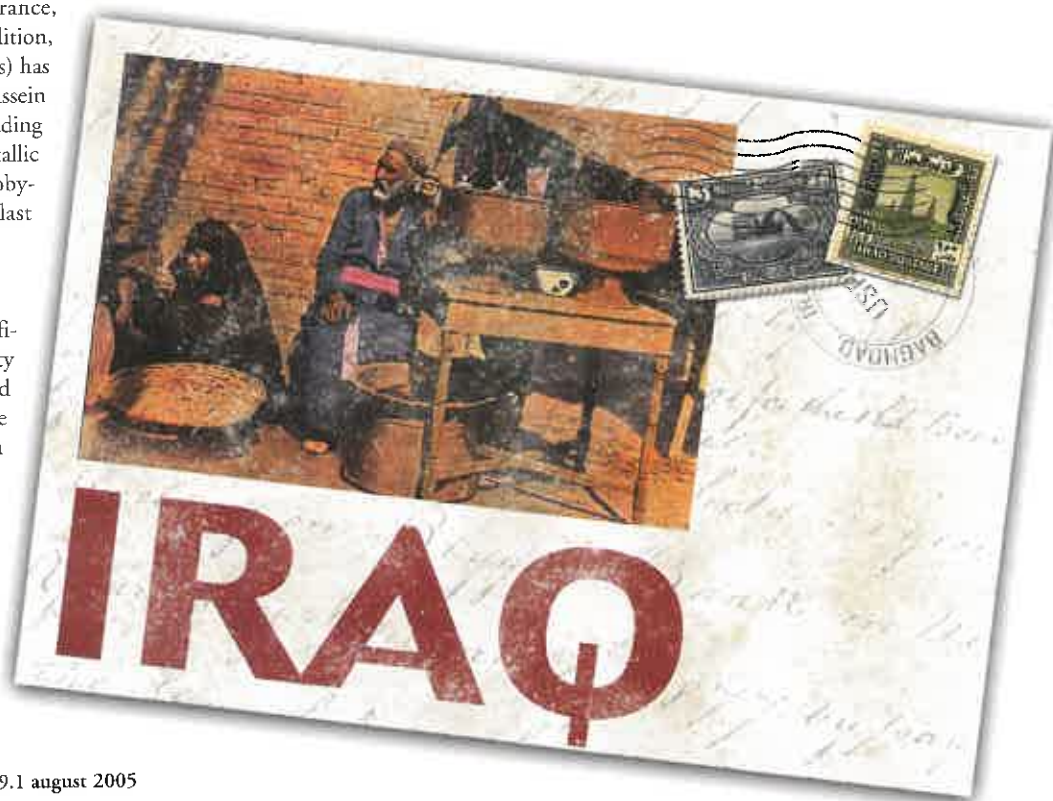
## Answering a Mine Action Need

Although the landmine problem has been present in Iraq for over 60 years, it was not until the early 1990s that mine action took form to reduce, remove and respond to the number of landmines that were littered across the war-torn country. Some of the organizations that have worked or are working in Iraq are MAG, Norwegian People's Aid, Handicap International, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), Aras DO, Tiroj DO, RONCO Consulting Corporation (under contract to the U.S. Department of State), Danish Demining Group and European Landmine Solutions.

**MAG.** MAG is very active in mine action in Iraq; it trains local staff in minefield survey, landmine clearance, explosive ordnance disposal, community liaison and mine awareness. Between 1992 and 1996, MAG conducted one of the largest demining programs in the world and now all mine action agencies working in the area utilize the results from MAG's work.

MAG has developed several programs to assist mine risk education (MRE) within the country. For example, the "child-to-child" approach began in 1998 and uses children to teach their peers and adults about the dangers of mines and UXO. In addition, MAG created the Data Coordination Unit, which maintains computerized records of mine casualties, MAG activities and the numbers of landmines and UXO items destroyed. These figures have allowed MAG to properly designate work and resources to appropriate areas in suitable amounts. Furthermore, MAG has collaborated with Ministry of Awkaf/Religious Affairs to improve an existing MRE booklet used for religious programs.

MAG mine action teams (MATs) were also developed in 1999; MAG currently uses 21 MATs and 10 community liaison teams who col-



lect information and facilitate MRE. As a result, in 2004, MAG reported an average of 20 casualties per month, which is a significant improvement compared to pre-war figures of around 500 per month. Despite this improvement, a MAG representative said, "Unexploded ordnance ... still poses a significant threat, with large areas contaminated with predominantly BLU-97 and KB1 cluster submunitions."<sup>1</sup>

mines, 1.3 million items of UXO and 6,312 cluster bomb units. Through MAG's extensive landmine removal efforts, over 7.6 million people have benefited and gained a stronger sense of security within the country. A reduction in casualties from 1,278 in 1993 to 72 in 2004 provides proof that MAG's work has not gone unnoticed.

**United Nations.** The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has led U.N.

Action Service, the United Nations Office for Project Services, the United States Department of State, international organizations/firms in south and central Iraq, and the mine action program in northern Iraq. The Mine Action Portfolio country team's 2005 funding appeal was \$46,878,748 (U.S.).

The NMAA has responsibility for strategic planning and budgeting, project coordination, donor relations, setting national mine action standards, and maintaining the national mine action database. Currently, RMACs are in place in the Basra governorate and plans for two others are in store for the central and northern parts of Iraq.

The NMAA vision and mission summarize the organization's goals. As written in the NMAA report, the vision is an "Iraqi society free from fear and impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance."<sup>2</sup> The mission is to "eliminate and control the impact of landmines and unexploded ordnance on Iraqi society."<sup>2</sup> If plans go smoothly, the program expects to reduce by 50 percent the impact from explosive remnants of war within five years.

### Future of Mine Action in Iraq

Due to extensive mine problems in Iraq, the U.N. Attorney General estimates 35 to 75 years are needed to clear all of Iraq's minefields. An estimated 18 years would be necessary to clear the northern part of Iraq alone. It is important to note, however, that these estimates are based on pre-war calculations and may not represent the new reality resulting from the current conflict.

Though a mine-safe Iraq is not in the near future, plans are in place within the country so that progress will continue. The new NMAA will bring support to mine action efforts through strategies, surveys and MRE. Such action can only lead to an improvement in the reduction of landmines and accidents.

Although security issues compound the already difficult task of conducting mine action in Iraq, achievements continue to take place through the work of MAG, the United Nations and the NMAA. These and other organizations provide the necessary support and manpower to help Iraq overcome its battle with landmines. ♦

See "References and Endnotes" on page 107

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Security restrictions imposed on MAG cause a tie-up of manpower, resources and vehicles. According to MAG, these restrictions make operational deployment more difficult, but not impossible. However, "whilst the security issues do complicate matters, the interruption to day-to-day activities is mitigated by good planning, well-trained national staff, SOPs [standard operating procedures] and appropriate security protocols."<sup>1</sup>

Despite tense and inconsistent working conditions, MAG has shown determination and dedication in its work in Iraq. MAG representatives said, "Perhaps MAG's single greatest achievement or testament is to have been working continuously since inception in 1993." In 12 years of mine action, MAG has cleared over 33 million square meters (12.74 square miles) of land, 30,000

supported mine action activities in Iraq and since January 2004, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has taken responsibility for MRE and deputy task manager for the United Nations Mine Action Cluster in 2004. The Mine Action Cluster has worked with the NMAA and others to develop and coordinate mine action support strategy in Iraq.

**NMAA.** In July 2003, the NMAA was organized in Baghdad and funded by the United States. In addition, regional mine action centers (RMACs) were established in Erbil in the north and Basra in the south. A Mine Action Portfolio country team was formed and included representatives from the entire mine action community in Iraq. The country team included the NMAA, UNDP, UNICEF, the United Nations Mine