Humanitarian vs. Military Mine Action

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**Humanitarian vs. Military**

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and commercial companies are well-known in the mine action community for conducting demining operations all over the world. But there is another breed of deminer that is becoming more and more common—the military. Militaries often have different objectives, tactics, opinions and experiences from professional mine action practitioners, which is frequently reflected in the way they conduct clearance operations. Can two groups so different find some common ground and work towards a world in which they not only coexist, but actually work in tandem to assist one another in carrying our demining?

**What Role Should the Military Play?**

One contentious topic of debate is whether or not militaries should ever be involved in mine action at all, or if, what exactly their role should be. Because the level of military involvement in mine action currently varies widely from region to region, there are many different views on the subject. There are those who believe their role should be limited, like Hugh Morris of Mine Tech International, who says, "I don't think the military have a role in mine action other than in a conflict situation where they cannot be stopped from reaching their objectives [organisations] or NGOs. I think the military have a role to secure their own force protection aims, to be able to move their forces and maybe move of civilians and movement of refugees. But when it is a post-conflict situation, the military should move on to other tasks, because they’re not civil administra tors and they’re not trained to do tasks of humanitarian mine clearing. It requires a lot of men and a lot of time, and I don’t believe any military has the time to do it. So I don’t think they have a role in a post-conflict situation in any country in the world to clear landmines."

He stresses that although the military, being paid for by the government, may be able to do such tasks for less money, if they are not properly trained and knowledgeable on international standards, then they will not be as effective as commercial or non-governmental organizations. Morris says, "The military have nothing but a military role in clearing mines, and then your NGOs and commercial companies are the ones who will step up in a post-conflict situation, unless there is money put into the military, and they would have to adhere to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS)."

Chuck Meadows of PeaceTrees Vietnam believes that the military should be more involved in the actual clearance of landmines. "In my opinion, any military for their military action work, John Wilkinson sums it up as "Followers." The NGOs and non-military organizations are the ones who will step up in a post-conflict situation, unless there is money put into the military, and they would have to adhere to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS)."

With the military working in many areas alongside non-military mine action practitioners, one might wonder if they see one another as collaborators or competitors. The overall feeling in the mine action community seems to be that the military is not in competition with NGOs and commercial organizations. One reason for this cited by a number of non-military mine action practitioners is that NGOs and commercial companies often hire ex-service personnel for their mine action work. John Wilkinson sums it up as "Followers." The NGOs and non-military organizations are the ones who will step up in a post-conflict situation, unless there is money put into the military, and they would have to adhere to the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS)."
way things are going in terms of military presence, military interests, people in the country who are on the inside of the wire from each other, so that makes very little sense." Paddy Blagden agrees: "I agree fully that NGOs sometimes did suffer as much as the other way round, but the impediments were within both organizations." The first step to successful cooperation is for both sides to swallow their pride and be willing to admit that the other has a lot to offer. This step will probably be added enormously by the fact that a lot of NGOs and commercial organizations are comprised of some former military themselves, which should create opportunities to internally bridge the gaps between the two groups.

Another problem when military becomes engaged in mine action is that they often have different priorities from the NGOs and commercial groups. Hugh Morris describes his experience with priorities differing from the military's: "[B]y 2004 we were really asking the military, do you really want to work with us, because we were getting a very mixed response. We were being told not to come into the area, that you were not going to see too much, that you are just going through and moving on, ... and again, we're both doing the same thing — we're both looking for something. There is a complete lack of understanding between these groups, they can be turned off by the way professional mine action organizations carry out demining. John Wilkinson states, "In many ways, a lot of demining, when a military person looks at it, it's kind of like, 'Geez, it's a huge reporting structure; it's relatively slower than mine clearing. We're not going to be here that long' — those kind of things. And then on the other side of the fence, when an NGO looks at the military, it's kind of like, 'You guys are ignoring too much of the threat, you're just moving through and moving on, ... and again, we're both doing the same thing, ... it's just a different approach to doing it.'" This remark also touches on another issue when the military gets involved in mine action: timetables. As mentioned before with the UNMACs, limited engagement times often mean that mine action practitioners lose ground with militaries when units change, having to re-establish their rapport with the incoming soldiers on the field. Paddy Blagden highlights this problem: "The trouble with military's is that they are initially pretty well-trained, as with most army units there is a kind of professional focus. To overcome this problem, John Wilkinson says, 'I think each has to recognize the other's planning timeline and its areas of primary interest,... I think it's an issue of communication which can be overcome within both sides, understanding what other does, how they do it and why they do it the way they do." But militaries are also sometimes reluctant to share information with non-military personnel, which can create difficulties when trying to work together in mine action. John Wilkinson describes this tendency: "Military minimise briefing or even what they sometimes call mine "clearances" are not the same as demining, and mine action practitioners think that the military needs to understand the differences between them and why they become more accurate in the states. 'I think the military needs to better understand what demining is ... and this requires a change of attitude frankly on the part of the military. We still run into situations where people say, 'Well, we don't do demining, we do mine clearance.'" Well, actually, when you're sitting in a minefield, you'll do better demining, or when you're sitting in a field of UXO, you'd better do demining. Because, although mine and non-military organizations often have different goals in mind when doing their respective work, they both need to understand how the other party takes a certain approach to it. Militaries believe that mine action is too time-consuming, which mine action professionals think the military overlooks much of the problem. The bottom line, according to Mr. Wilkinson, is "we're both doing the same thing — we're both removing mines and detecting and hopefully picking up UXO... it's just different approaches to doing it." The disadvantage that seems to be most agreed upon is that many militaries getting involved in demining are not trained according to modern standards. Mine action involves a classification system and that, for operational safety, they often operate on the fringes of the war. To overcome this problem, John Wilkinson says, "I think each has to recognize the other's planning timeline and its areas of primary interest,... I think it's an issue of communication which can be overcome within both sides, understanding what other does, how they do it and why they do it the way they do." ... Militaries are also sometimes reluctant to share information with non-military personnel, which can create difficulties when trying to work together in mine action. John Wilkinson describes this tendency: "Military minimise briefing or even what they sometimes call mine "clearances" are not the same as demining, and mine action practitioners think that the military needs to understand the differences between them and why they become more accurate in the states. 'I think the military needs to better understand what demining is ... and this requires a change of attitude frankly on the part of the military. 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The MACC manages and coordinates a full set of PKM demining assets. These currently include a Kenyan Engineering Company, which consists of two humanist-trained manual demining troops; a Swedish demining company, which is made up of both a manual and a mechanical demining capacity; and a Bangladeshi demining company, which consists of manual deminers as well as a mine detection dog (MDD) team. In addition, the MACC employs MECHEM, a South African civil contractor, for road clearance operations, as well as an Emergency EOD field team and two MRE field teams.

The primary role and responsibility of the Force demining assets is to support the mobility and safety of the PKM as well as to provide specialist operational capability. Once demarcation commences, the main focus of work for the Force demining assets will be the clearance of roads and access routes to pillbox sites as well as clearing of the actual pillar sites along the delineated border between the two countries. Current preparations for demining in support of demarcation intend to deploy the Force demining assets in support of the MACC’s demining operation, where all assets work alongside each other in a mutually supportive manner.

The MACC/FMAC is responsible for the receipt and tasking priorities. As the largest center yet among the MACC, the MACC’s managing asset comprised of assets coupled with a unique skill base. This is the first time in UN peacekeeping history that a peacekeeping mission has effectively incorporated into the establish- ment of the mission an integrated and civilian and military mine action headquarters. This unprecedented achievement has been accomplished through the establishment of large areas of land in Ethiopia and a significant reduction of the landmine and UXO threat for the local population. Being the first UN mine action establishment to effectively integrate all civilian and military mine action compo- nents of a UN peacekeeping mission within a single headquarters structure, the UNMEE MACC has the potential to serve as a template for the creation of future mine action centers that are part of UN peacekeeping operations where a mine action element is required.

In addition, there are military officers working at the MACC/FMAC. These officers are in fact UN Military Observers (UNMOs) seconded to the MACC for specific assignments. For example, two UNMOs act as Force MRE Officers; one acts as the Project Officer Demining for Demarcation; one acts as the Field Mine Action Liaison Officer; and one acts as the Mine Action Liaison Officer in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In total, there are currently five UNMOs seconded to the MACC in task from Major to Lieutenant Colonel.

The civilian international staff of the MACC are predominantly ex-military staff from a variety of countries. The majority of them have considerable demining and operational management experience. At the MACC, they fill positions such as Programme Manager, Chief of Operations, Operations Officers, Regional Liaison Officers, EOD Officers, Chief of Information, Logistics Officer and Programme/Training Officer. As a team, they are responsible for the smooth functioning of the UNMEE MACC.

The Future

The largest task yet awaiting the MACC/FMAC is the continuation of coordi- nating the clearance tasks of roads, access routes to pillbox sites as well as pillar sites in Sections Center and West to support the demarcation process of the Ethiopian Eritrean Boundary Commission (EEBC) more rapidly as well as to address the existing threat of newly laid landmines (30 newly discovered on roads were reported in 18 months). This time, the contract was awarded to MECHEM. MECHEM has three clearance components: a mechanical team, a manual team and an MDD component.

MCC Management and Coordination

All mine action tasks carried out by the Force demining assets are closely planned, coordinated and supervised by the UNMEE MACC/FMAC. An experienced set of both civilian and military staff members of the Force demining assets is responsible for the receipt of tasking requests, issuance of tasking orders, monitoring of tasks, implementation of quality and safety standards, as well as supervision of activities in completion of task orders.

The operations section of the MACC works alongside the FMAC. Three Liaison Officers (one from each demining component) work at the FMAC. They are in charge of directly liaising and coordinating tasks that are issued by the MACC operations section. These officers report to the civilian Operations Officer of the MACC, who is responsible for the coordination of the assets and tasking priorities.

Demining Statistics

Since its inception, the MACC has coordinated, managed or supervised the following clearance operations:

- Clearance of 51,058,794 m2 of land
- Clearance of 9,727 km2 of roads
- Disposal of 3,739 AP mines
- Disposal of 2,514 AT mines and 48,256 items of UXO

These figures are the results of a combined military and civilian composite of demining operations since the beginning of the MACC through January 2004. They are a reflection of the commitment and cooperation between the MACC’s management and the FMAC’s operations across the Mission area—an achievement that has been realised through joint efforts among contributing local authorities, NGOs and Force demining assets.

Conclusion

The integration of a MACC into a peacekeeping operation has witnessed a successful management of assets coupled with a unique skill base. This is the first time in UN peacekeeping history that a peacekeeping mission has effectively incorporated into the establishment of the mission an integrated and civilian and military mine action headquarters. This unprecedented achievement has been accomplished through the establishment of large areas of land in Ethiopia and a significant reduction of the landmine and UXO threat for the local population. Being the first UN mine action establishment to effectively integrate all civilian and military mine action components of a UN peacekeeping mission within a single headquarters structure, the UNMEE MACC has the potential to serve as a template for the creation of future mine action centers that are part of UN peacekeeping operations where a mine action element is required.

*Photos by the authors.

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the needs and goals of the other. As John Wilkinson points out, "...it is the same thing, but different sides of the same coin,? and getting those two sides to work in concert with one another is key to the progress of humanitarian demining and will undoubtedly benefit both as they work towards the mutual objective of a world safe from mines and UXO.

Biographical Information

High Morris attended Sandhurst Military Academy and complet- ed 10 years of military service in the British army where he retired as a Captain. He then joined MineTech International, where he was the Operations Manager, managing various contracts around the world (Russia, Kosovo, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Kuwait, Somalia, Ethiopia, Australia), many of which involved working alongside different militaries. For the past four years, he has been the Operations Director of MineTech International.

Chuck Meadows is a retired U.S. Marine Corps Colonel with 26 years of active service. His organization, PeaceTrees Vietnam, has been operat- ing in cooperation with the Vietnamese army for the past seven years.

John Wilkinson spent 34 years in the U.S. Air Force (11 active duty and 23 in the Reserves), and concurrently with his time in the Reserves, 23 years at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Mr. Wilkinson has been RONCO’s Vice President of Operations since October 2001, following service from both the Air Force and USAID. RONCO has been demining with and for the U.S. Army in Afghanistan since early 2002. They also have extensive experience working with military organizations in places such as Iraq, Estonia and the Crimean Arab Republic.

Paddy Blagden spent 15 years in the British army, and has worked in mine clearance since 1991. He has worked on the demining actions of a num- ber of armies, most recently when advising a Japanese NGO (JHOMI) in Thailand, where the organization worked alongside the Thai army’s Humanitarian Mine Action Units.

Endnotes

5. E-mail correspondence with Paddy Blagden. May 13, 2004.

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