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. Military forces 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 be involved in mine action and if so, 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 that believe their role should be limited, like Hugh Morris of MineTech International, who says, “I don’t think the military have a role in mine action other than in a conflict situation where they cannot bring in commercial organisations (NGOs) or NGOs. I think the military have a role to secure their own force protection, to allow movement of their forces and maybe movement 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 administrators and they’re not trained to do tasks of a humanitarian mine clearing nature. 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 tasks such as clearing landmines, if they are not properly trained and knowledgeable on international standards, then they will not be as effective as commercial or non-governmental organisations. 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’d 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 mines. “In my view, any military for any mine action, their role should be in the removal of any mines... that they may have used or put down in any conflict that they have been engaged in. Then, in their own countries, I think they would be the appropriate ones to assist in the removal of any landmines that any insurgents, rebels or terrorists, or anybody else have in fact put in the ground.” John Wilkinson of RONCO also sees the role of the military as one of involvement in clearance, but in addition he emphasises that their involvement in this aspect of mine action is more appropriate than in other aspects such as mine risk education (MRE): “I think that the mine action in terms of the removal of the mines as opposed to MRE is probably more a role for the military to play.”

Another view is that the military should mainly be involved in the “behind-the-scenes” of mine action, such as providing training, equipment, logistics and planning. Paddy Blagden, an independent consultant of International Mine Action believes this to be the best type of involvement in mine action for the military: “There’s so much that the military can do to help the NGOs even without getting near a minefield, and that I’d be far more happy with, because I don’t like seeing soldiers being pushed into doing mine clearance because it’s part of their military duty.”

Collaborators or Competitors?

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 organisations. One reason for this cited by a number of non-military mine action practitioners is that NGOs and commercial companies often hire ex-military personnel for their mine action work. John Wilkinson sums it up as follows: “To me—many of the people we hire and that everybody else hires are former military, especially to run our field operations. So I never thought that there was a sort of hard and fast division between the non-military and the military, but all of them can be bridged and can be made to work in a complementary manner.”

Some non-military mine action workers (the particular cases in which their organisations are working with the military in a harmonious way). As an example of how the two can work hand-in-hand Paddy Blagden tells a story of a Japanese NGO working in Thailand: “I’ve never thought that there was a sort of hard and fast division between the military and NGOs; I think there’s different areas of interest, different areas of access, different areas of expertise, but all of them can be bridged and can be made to work in a complementary manner.”

Alongside one of the Thailand Mine Action Center’s (TMAC’s) Humanitarian Mine Action (HMA) teams, which are composed of members of the Thai army, the TMAC was unable to use its machines, so the NGO brought them, making sure that when the machines were returned, the TMAC could carry on with its work with a fully funded and serviced machine. Thus, the NGO’s deminers could use a piece of equipment too expensive for them to own for only the cost of fuel and servicing. “And this sympathetic relationship worked—we get enormous assistance from the army as a result,” Blagden says. John Wilkinson says that when RONCO first began working with the US military in Afghanistan, they weren’t sure how to work together, partly because the military didn’t really understand the process of demining and its value. It didn’t take long, though, as he explains: “I think the [US] military can do a lot to help the NGOs even without getting near a minefield, and that I’d be far more happy with, because I don’t like seeing soldiers being pushed into doing mine clearance because it’s part of their military duty.”

Facing the Challenges

Though militaries can be a valuable resource if they use their assets to mount collaborative efforts with non-military groups, there are still a number of challenges when involving the military in mine action. One of the biggest of these is the issues and prejudices that each group has towards the other. Hugh Morris notes that “…soldiers more often than not consider civilians to be a necessary evil and so are uncomfortable in their presence.” Also, even though non-military organisations may have more expertise in humanitarian roles, soldiers may resist learning from civilians. As a former military member himself, Paddy Blagden understands this attitude: “…I can tell you as an ex-military that army people often think that they know it all. The last time I said that a farmer was overcharged by a money lender, he thought I had no idea.”

One might wonder if the military would do well to overcome their unwillingness to learn from civilians, “because I think some of our guys would learn quite a lot… I think that if they can overcome this unwillingness by realising that they will save lives if they learn from people who are mine clearing the whole time in professionals, then I think I will help enormously. If they won’t, then I am afraid they’ve got to learn the way that we did (i.e., by making a large number of mistakes), but that is a very painful process, and quite a lot of people can directly suffer as a result.”

On the other hand, as Mr. Wilkinson articulates, non-military organisations can be just as guilty of such prejudice: “…[I]t requires a change of attitude and a change of understanding on the part of the military. It also in some cases requires a change in attitude on the part of the NGOs—some NGOs prefer not to deal with the military. Well, the
way things are going in terms of military presence, military interests, people in transit, the sheer side-on side of the wire from each other that makes very little sense." Paddy Blagden agrees: "I agree fully - that NGOs sometimes didit soldier as much as the other way round, but it's not clear whether it is a difference within both organisa-
tions." The first step to successful cooperation is for both sides to
swear 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 organisations are comprised of some for-
mer military themselves, which should create opportunities to inter-
tially bridge the gaps between the two groups.

Another problem when militaries become 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 "It's a war we NGOs or commercial, we
clear mines to the International Mine Action Standards, and that
imposes upon us a number of rules and a number of quality assurance
checks... No-one of those rules apply to the military, and the military
will clear mines as an expedient means of creating a camp, getting
targets, or getting through a minefield barrier." Because of these stan-
dards, demining often requires more time and more paperwork than
the military might need. If they don't understand the reasoning behind
such regulations, they can be turned off by the way professional mine
action organisations 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
mean that armies action practitioners lose ground when
militaries do demining, we do mine clearance.' Well yeah, but, when you're
in a field of
minefield detection and mine clearance and this is military and
that civilisations I think we're breaking down to good
effect and to good purpose," for improvement. What suggestions do members of the NGO
and commercial sectors of mine action have for improving this relationship?

Many mine action practitioners realise that there is a differ-
cence between the military and non-military approaches to mine
action. Military minefield breaching or even what they sometimes call
"mine clearance" are not the same as demining, and mine action prac-
titioners think the military needs to understand the difference
between them in order to avoid confusing or conflicting standards.
"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.'" He also observes: "That is a different approach to doing it..." This remark also touches on another issue when the
military gets involved in mine action: timeliness. As mentioned above
with RONCO's work in Afghanistan, 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. Paddy Blagden points to this problem: "The slight trouble with the military is that although they are initially pretty well-trained, as well as army units there's a lot of turnover. To overcome this problem, John
Wilkinson states, "I think each has to recognise the other's planning
timelines and its areas of primary interest... I think it's an issue of com-
wealth in the global effort to eliminate mines and landmines and what each
other does, how they do it and why they do it the way they do it."
Conduct landmine safety training for mission personnel, both military and civilian, and other humanitarian actors operating in Eritrea.

In 2002, the MACC determined a need for a road verification/clearance capacity for locating presumably deep-buried mines and UXO and for increasing the safety of movement and mobility of the PKF and humanitarian operations in the TSZ. The five-by-five-kilometer road to be constructed on this job was the AbkhaSF (PKF Unit) Ltd.

During UXB's contract period until 2003, the UNMEE MACC planned the operations and tasked the route clearance capacity. In mid-2003, with the realization that deep-buried mines did not pose the threat that was initially assumed, the MACC recommended that the contract of UXB not be extended. UXB concluded operations in Eritrea in mid-July 2003.

In mid-2003, the mine clearance/verification contract was settled, it was decided to address the need to clear roads in support of the border demarcation process of the Ethiopian-Eritrean Boundary Commission (EEBC) more rapidly as well as to address the existing threat of newly laid mines (30 newly coordinated on roads were reported in 18 months). This time, the contract was awarded to MECHEM. MECHEM has three clearance components: a mechanical team, an aerial team, and an MDD component.

MACC Management and Coordination

All mine action tasks carried out by the Force demining assets are closely planned, supervised and supervised by the UNMEE MACC/FMAC. An experienced set of both civilian and military staff members of the MACC/FMAC is responsible for the reception of tasking requests, issuance of tasking orders, monitoring of tasks, implementation of quality assurance 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 contractor) 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 Manager of the MACC, who is responsible for the coordination of the assets and tasking priorities.

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 are in the FMAC MRE: Officers: one as the Project Officer Demining for Demarcation; the other one as the Field Mine Action Liaison Officer; and one 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 Officer, Regional Liaison Officers, EOD Officer, 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 coordination tasks on roads, access routes to pillar sites as well as pillar sites in Sector Center and West to support the demarcation project of the EEBC. Originally, it was intended that this project would commence in 2003. However, due to the political stalemate between the two countries concerning the delineation of their border, the EEBC has been unable to proceed with demarcation. As a result, the sites for pillars in Sector Center and West of the TSZ remain unoccupied, holding back the Force assets to demine the necessary areas in preparation for marking the border. Pillar sites in Sector East have already been cleared and cleared in preparation for demarcation as this was underway prior to the disagreement between these two countries concerning the delineation of the EEBC. In the interim, the international community anticipates an agreement between Ethiopia and Eritrea concerning demarcation, the Force demining assets will continue to effectively conduct UNMEE and humanitarian clearance tasks in areas where populations are those affected by the chr east of mines and UXO.

Currently, this requirement is greatest in the minefields of the Shibato region in Sector West.

Demining Statistics

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

- Clearance of 51,058,794 sq. m of land
- Clearance of 9,277 km2 of roads
- Removal of 2,739 AM mines
- Removal of 8,424 AT mines and 1,025 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 to demining 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 skills base. This is the first time in UN peacekeeping history that a peackeeping mission has effectively incorporated into the establish-ment of the mission structure an integrated civilian and military mine action headquarters. This unprecedented achievement has been accomplished because the IMAC is responsible for all aspects of the mission's demining operations. The MACC is responsible for the creation of future mine action centers that are part of UN peacekeeping operations where a mine action element is required.

Images and contact information are available.

NGOs, continued from page 41

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

Biographical Information

Hugh Morris attended Sandhurst Military Academy and completed 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, Kazakhstan, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka, Iraq, Kuwait, Somalia, Ethiopia, Afghanistan), 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, PangeaVeen, has been operating in cooperation with the Vietnamese army for the past seven years.

John Wilkinson spent 36 years in the U.S. Air Force (11 active duty and 25 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 retirement from both the Air Force and USAID. RONCO has been demining 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, Eritrea and the Central Asian Republics.

Paddy Blagden spent 34 years in the British army, and has worked in mine clearance since 1991. He has tackled the demining activities of a number of armies, most recently when advising a Japanese NGO (JHDM) 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.