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Detritus of Conflict: The U.S. Approach to the Humanitarian Problem Posed by Landmines and other Hazardous Remnants of War

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Landmines as we know them today -- victim-activated explosive devices -- have been around since at least our own Civil War. Indeed, five potent landmines, or, as they were originally called, "land torpedoes," from that war were found near Mobile, Alabama in the 1960s¹. The fact that these devices were still dangerous a century after the war had ended demonstrates so well the challenges in addressing the legacy of landmines and other still potent explosive remnants from past wars in every hemisphere.

Narrowly defined, humanitarian mine action consists of landmine clearance and the clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO), mine risk education for people in areas infested by landmines, assistance to survivors of landmine and UXO accidents, and research and development into new clearance technologies.

But humanitarian mine action is not about landmines as much as it is about the effects that these "hidden killers" have on innocent people whose lives and livelihoods are being shattered by devices like the "land torpedoes," left behind in more than 60 nations² around the world from wars past. Humanitarian mine action can and should be about more than just clearing mines and other explosive remnants of war such as unexploded bombs, artillery and mortar shells, rockets and grenades. Also, mine action efforts can and should play a vital role in furthering peace and stability. Cleared lands provide a physical environment that allows for national reconciliation, stability and economic development. Indeed, in addressing the horrific legacy of landmines and UXO, we are not only helping to secure innocents from harm and restore land to productivity, we also are providing something essential for communities ravaged by war: hope. Mine action encourages hope that the future can be better than the past and hope that patterns of war and violence can be replaced with patterns of peace and prosperity.

U.S. Mine Action: Early, Constant and Maturing

The first mine clearance programs began taking shape in Afghanistan³ and Cambodia, from the late 1980s through the early 1990s, respectively. These fledgling efforts laid the foundation for a worldwide movement that has since galvanized international opinion and support, and mobilized significant financial resources to address the harm caused by the indiscriminate use of persistent landmines. The United States Government helped to fund these first demining efforts and has remained the largest contributor to mine action ever since.

The U.S. Government has been a pioneer and steadfast supporter of mine action, helping where it can by providing financial support to and training for mine risk education initiatives and clearance efforts. The U.S. furthermore, has also assisted in the investigation of new detection and clearance technologies, the development of indigenous mine action capacities and the formation of a wide array of public-private partnerships. The aim of these partnerships has been to reinforce the official mine action programs of the United States, other donor nations, the United Nations, and the Organization of American States.

In 1993, the U.S. made the response to the landmine crisis a priority and organized its previously ad-hoc efforts into the formal U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program⁴. Since then, the U.S. Government has spent about \$700 million dollars to support mine action efforts in forty-five countries.

The United States has also been and remains a consistent advocate for the first international landmine treaty: the Amended Mines Protocol to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons⁵, which governs the use of not only anti-personnel landmines, but also anti-vehicle mines, improvised explosive devices and booby traps. As far back as 1980, the United States took the lead in getting this Convention to consider regulating the use of persistent landmines worldwide. In 1998, the U.S.-drafted Amendment entered into force and was ratified by the United States in May 1999.

During the 1990's, the U.S. took other tangible unilateral steps to address the global landmine problem, including:

- 1992: Implemented a unilateral ban on the export of anti-personnel landmines⁶.
- 1996: Initiated the removal of U.S. landmines from the perimeter of the U.S. Naval Base in Guantanamo, Cuba, the last static U.S.-controlled minefield in the world. Clearance was completed in 1999 and quality assurance was completed in 2000.
- 1997: Ceased production of persistent landmines.
- 1997: The President designated a senior U.S. Government official as his Special Representative for Mine Action and established offices in the State Department to focus on mine action assistance and partnerships.
- 1998: Completed the unilateral destruction of 3.3 million of its non-self-destructing landmines, retaining only enough for training, research and development, and the defense of South Korea.

In 2001, the U.S. established the world's first Quick Reaction Demining Force to help strengthen cease-fires and peace settlements rapidly around the globe, and thereby hasten the return of internally displaced persons and refugees and the movement of relief supplies. The U.S. also supported the Government of Slovenia's International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims' Assistance, through whose efforts \$20 million in donated funds were used to solicit matching grants and underwrite about \$70 million in mine action programs throughout the Balkan states. Moreover, the State Department has significantly increased its effort since 2001 to encourage private efforts in conjunction with official donor efforts worldwide.

Impressive as the collective accomplishments of the U.S. Government, the private sector, and other donor governments have been, for over 14 years, they still do not provide a full response to the enormous tasks that remain. The effort to make the world "mine safe" is worthy but the resources to realize it are limited. Therefore, we must regularly review the effectiveness of our work and identify the most efficient ways to realize our vision for the future of mine action.

Reviewing the Effectiveness of Our Work

An old adage says: "We achieve what we measure, so we had better measure what we want to achieve." This is particularly true in mine action. We must mark our progress in the areas that have the most meaning and base this progress, as much as possible, on reliable indicators and sound data.

By any measure, international mine action efforts have achieved a great deal to date. A short review of these accomplishments is in order. They include:

- The development of a range of technologies to enhance a deminer's "toolbox." For example, mine detecting dogs and their trained human handlers have been pioneered and put into use, resulting in dramatic increases in both productivity and safety of demining operations.
- The development and adoption of a refined set of international standards and protocols addressing all aspects of mine action.
- The clearance of thousands of square kilometers of land through assistance provided to nearly sixty countries.
- The removal of millions of dangerous persistent mines.
- A reported decline in the number of victims per year from landmines from 26,000 to less than half that amount⁷.
- Since 2000, a reduction on the estimated number of mines going into the ground, compared with the estimated number of those removed⁸.

These accomplishments have been brought about by a truly international, collective effort of mine-affected countries, donor nations, non-governmental organizations, private corporations and concerned individuals.

When the United States first engaged in humanitarian demining, performance was measured almost exclusively by reference to the number of mines removed. While this may be a good indicator of clearance efficiencies, it is not an adequate indicator of the overall contributions that a program is making toward reducing the harmful impact of landmines and UXO to civilians. Similarly, counting the number of people who attend a mine risk education course does not tell us how effective that course will be in minimizing risky behaviors.

Fortunately, other performance measures have been identified that are more useful in assessing progress, such as casualty figures and area of land cleared. But we can do even better. Donor resources are not infinite and donor fatigue is a real concern in a world with competing demands. It is essential that mine action practitioners adopt even more meaningful measures of performance. Therefore inputs - - meaning both funding and effort - - should be definitively linked to specific social and economic outputs, such as increased food production, restored roads, decreased casualty rates and enhanced livelihoods.

For donor resources to be most effective, countries affected by landmines and other explosive remnants of war, working with donors, must establish sound national strategic plans that focus efforts where the need is the greatest. The goal should be to balance risk with resources and make the most of the funds provided. These plans should outline an intended "end state" for international assistance to the country, where the most acute threats are to be removed immediately in priority order, with less pressing requirements addressed once the country has an indigenous, self-sustaining program in place.

For example, the results from Landmine Impact Surveys conducted in Chad and Yemen⁹, in recent years, clearly indicate that the most dangerous and pressing clearance needs, those lands that posed the greatest risk of causing casualties and the most economic harm, amounted to only a small fraction of total contaminated area. All country programs should similarly define and prioritize their problems and put into effect realistic, output-oriented plans for liberating their lands and protecting their people.

We also must demand that affected countries wholeheartedly adopt mine action as a national priority, integrating it into other development programs. One aspect of U.S. Government mine action efforts has been to help host governments develop self-sustaining demining programs so that we can gradually redirect our assistance to other needy mine-affected nations. Therefore, the United States calls upon host governments to take an even greater share of responsibility for their national mine action programs. This entails not only allocating more of their own resources for mine action, but also assuming effective overall program direction and management.

Broadening the Vision and Impact of Our Efforts

Mine action must be more than the sum of its parts: Mine and UXO clearance, survivors' assistance, mine risk education, and research and development into new detection and clearance technologies. Mine action, rather, should be expanded to encompass remediation of all hazardous and explosive remnants of war, including any abandoned persistent munitions, with the aim of serving the broader objectives of post-conflict reconstruction and national reconciliation. Large concentrations of mines and other explosive residue from war exacerbate the social conditions within affected countries that can lead to lawlessness, repression, anarchy, or extremism. In mine-affected developing countries, conditions such as hunger, poverty and economic deprivation can be made worse by the uncontrolled violence that results from widespread mine and UXO contamination. Demobilized soldiers and poorly disciplined militias with large amounts of small arms and other light weapons can undermine stability and rule of law. Our policy approaches seek to control these flows and to assist in securing stored weapons for legitimate governmental purposes where a risk of diversion exists.

Furthermore, efforts must be expanded beyond 'clean-up' of landmines and UXO, to more fully integrate mine action writ large, as an institution, into a comprehensive response to adverse social and economic conditions. The effect of our limited resources should be amplified by targeting them to the neediest of communities to heal the physical and psychological wounds of war and help create an environment conducive to economic opportunity. Post-conflict communities whose inhabitants can grow their own food and transport their goods to market, whose young men have options other than soldiering, and whose children can walk to school in safety, have the basic building blocks of stable societies.

When viewed in this larger context of fostering a more peaceful environment in conflict-prone areas, mine action is not an end-in-itself. Its success, rather, can and must be measured by its contributions to reconstruction, rehabilitation, reconciliation and development. Part of this contribution involves the development of indigenous program management capacity backed by the political commitment of mine-affected country leadership to assume primary responsibility for the effort.

Sadly, the current body of international mine action "experts" running national programs is too large and unwieldy. And, although it is widely recognized that fully indigenized programs are a key indicator of success, there are too few examples of self-sustaining programs operated and managed by the affected countries. Therefore, in order to broaden the potential impact of our efforts, we must seek a gradual reduction in the number of expatriates working in mine action, as well as a corresponding increase in the rate of transfer of knowledge and responsibility to indigenous mine action authorities.

The mine detection dog program in Afghanistan is a good example of how the process of developing indigenous capacity could work elsewhere. Beginning in the late 1980's, U.S. and foreign contractors provided the first teams of dogs as well as extensive training and veterinary support. Over time, Afghans working in the Afghan Mine Dog Center, or MDC, took on more and more of the functions formerly performed by expatriates¹⁰.

Today, the MDC is one of the largest users of mine dogs in the world. Its more than 160 working dogs represent approximately twenty percent of the world's capacity and it is able to sustain them with MDC's own breeding and veterinary programs. MDC is run and managed by Afghans with only limited outside technical assistance.

The international mine action community must intensify collaboration in developing a clear set of agreed, measurable objectives to guide our future efforts. In Kosovo, the most pressing mine threats were neutralized within a very few years, not decades, and provided a residual capacity to deal with any lingering hazards. That battle-scarred province was declared "mine safe" in 2001¹¹. Such a scenario should be the rule, not the exception.

Specifically, I would like to see an aggressive international mine action agenda, in the coming years, that boasts the following objectives:

- 5 or 6 more countries are declared "mine-safe" by 2005.
- The 5 most mine-affected countries, in terms of risk to civilians and harm to post-conflict recovery, are the focus of intensified and coordinated international effort.
- All countries receiving U.S. and other donor nation assistance for more than three years establish a strategic national plan, including indigenous capacity building that has clearly defined outputs and an achievable end-state.
- The International Testing and Evaluation Program (ITEP), in which the U.S., the European Commission, Belgium, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Sweden are attempting to harmonize and rationalize their research and development in mine detection and clearance, is well supported and coordinated with other testing programs¹².
- The funding base for mine action is both increased and diversified, with amounts from private sources substantially increased annually for the next five years.
- A measurable program is agreed among active mine action entities aimed at reduction in expatriate staff within each mine-affected country from today's levels, eventually leading to a situation where programs are led and staffed almost entirely by nationals of the country.
- Landmine Impact Surveys conducted in 20 of the most heavily contaminated countries by 2005.

A renewed vision for mine action suggests that, as we strive to achieve a world safe from mines, UXO and other detritus of war, we do so in a manner that maintains the broader objectives relating to recovery and development. Our efforts should contribute to the processes of reconciliation and recovery and, where appropriate, the international community's efforts should be translated into useful indigenous capacity. Affected countries would then be in a position to manage and allocate their own capabilities over the longer term, as needed.

Achieving Renewal through Creativity and Cooperation

Serious pursuit of this vision of a world far less plagued by the entire gamut of explosive remnants of war is a function not only of resources. It also involves tapping the immense pool of creativity that exists within the international community, including governments and international organizations, but prominently including private parties, be they NGOs, universities, business enterprises, or committed individuals.

The United States Government is going to continue to be a major financial supporter of mine action programs well into the foreseeable future. In Fiscal Year 2003, for example, we will provide an aggregate \$101 million to over 40 countries. In 2002, an innovative joint U.S.-Mozambican Quick Reaction Demining Force (QRDF) deployed to Sri Lanka¹³ immediately upon the cease-fire there to clear landmines and enable internally displaced persons to return to their homes and livelihoods safely, thereby reinforcing the peace process. The QRDF was similarly dispatched to Sudan's Nuba region in 2002, to clear critical roadways in support of other humanitarian objectives and the peace process ongoing in Switzerland. Events in Angola¹⁴ will hopefully permit us to increase our already substantial mine action activities there, particularly to areas previously cut off by conflict.

The United States supports mine clearance, survivors' assistance, mine risk education, and projects designed specifically to improve program planning and management skills, such as Impact Surveys and accredited training for senior and mid-level mine action managers in affected countries. The U.S. also supports a variety of research and development efforts into new technologies to detect and clear landmines more efficiently. While progress around the world is being made, the reckless use of persistent landmines has not ended, and some of today's hostilities are likely to become tomorrow's burden for major mine action donors, including the U.S. The U.S. Government is very likely to remain a leader in mine action, and its contribution to the effort will be most effective if its activities are part of a well-conceived international program of action.

For its part, the entire mine action community must work together to ensure that our collective efforts are complementary and our aims compatible. Cooperative funding initiatives, such as the aforementioned International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF)¹⁵ based in Slovenia, whose mandate covers the Balkans and has recently expanded to the Caucasus as well, offer a model for how resources can be pooled to maximize the benefit of donated funds. By establishing a matching grant system, the U.S. has worked with 29 other donors to mobilize over \$100 million to support mine action in the Balkans. The United States is also working closely with the European Union to coordinate our information management, geographic information systems (GIS) and Impact Survey efforts.

Promoting Public-Private Partnerships to Reinforce Mine Action

In seeking to expand the base of mine action support beyond that provided by governments, the U.S. has increasingly recognized the vital role that individual citizens, civic and religious associations, non-governmental organizations, charities and corporations can play in helping to address the harmful effects caused by persistent landmines.

To date, the U.S. Department of State has cultivated nearly thirty public-private partnerships with individuals and organizations that have reinforced mine action efforts worldwide¹⁶. Their contributions have already made a difference, and are increasing. They deserve a share of the credit for what has been achieved to date. We have a growing list of projects and partners that are engaged in some form of mine action. These initiatives range from physical and psychological rehabilitation for survivors of mine accidents and mine risk education for those who live in mine-infested areas, to direct support for mine clearance efforts. We welcome new, energetic and innovative groups and individuals to participate in our public-private partnership network.

Relating Mine Action to Policy

The United States Government is currently conducting a landmine policy review. While it is premature to speculate on the specifics of a policy under deliberation, this review has paid close attention to the humanitarian dimension, as described in this essay, and to the national security dimension, given the wide-ranging tasks presently being assigned around the world to the U.S. military. This review, being conducted by the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, and the Department of State, has included a substantive evaluation of positions from a wide range of individuals and non-governmental organizations with expertise in this area.

As the world's largest donor to mine action efforts, the U.S. is acutely attuned to the types of munitions and military or paramilitary practices that have created the humanitarian crisis in recent years. These insights will inform the policy review, guided by the conviction that, mine action goals should not be seen as an either-or proposition with national security, nor suffer any loss of support due to different perspectives in the realm of policy. The innocent civilians at risk today from live landmines hidden in their midst deserve our full and unqualified support.

The Path Ahead

The future of mine action and the complementary efforts to protect civilians from mines and other explosive remnants of war should be dynamic and fruitful. A great deal has been learned since the inception of humanitarian demining just over a decade ago. This accumulated body of knowledge will serve the world well in the future. The U.S. Government, governments of donor and mine-affected nations, international organizations, and the private sector, together have created a formidable international network of humanitarian mine action. Now we must set our sights higher and apply the financial and human capital at our disposal to help war-ravaged communities restore stable societies. Working together, we can realistically set our sights on achieving a world all of whose children may walk the earth in safety.

NOTES

¹ "Milestones in Humanitarian Demining: Development of the Landmine Threat and the Discipline of Humanitarian Demining," U.S. Dept. of State Fact Sheet, April 15, 2002. A copy of these Milestones has been reproduced within the Appendix to this essay. The Milestones provide a brief overview of the historic development of the global landmine problem, and also outline the key steps taken over the years, both legal and programmatic, to mitigate it. (See, also: <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/fs/2002/8512.htm>.)

² "To Walk the Earth In Safety: The United States Commitment to Humanitarian Demining," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs annual report, 3rd Edition, November 2001, page A-50.

³ "The U.S. Humanitarian Demining Program in Afghanistan," U.S. Dept. of State Fact Sheet, December 1, 2001.

⁴ "Milestones in Humanitarian Demining."

⁵ See <http://www.cwttreaty.com/amendedmineprotocol.htm>.

⁶ "Milestones in Humanitarian Demining."

⁷ "To Walk the Earth In Safety," 3rd Edition, November 2001, page A-50.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ "Successful Completion of First Landmine Impact Survey in Yemen," U.S. Dept. of State Media Note, October 4, 2000.

¹⁰ "Returning Mine-Free Land to the Afghani People: Afghanistan Mine Detection and Dog Center," by Susanna Sprinkel, Journal of Mine Action, Mine Action Information Center, Issue 5.3, Fall 2001, pp. 101-103. See also "Afghan's Best Friend: Mine Clearing Dogs," by Margaret Coker, Atlanta Journal and Constitution, January 20, 2002, page 15.

- 11 "The Kosovo MACC: The Most Successful Mine Action Program Ever, " by J.J. Scott, Journal of Mine Action, Mine Action Information Center, Issue 6.1, Winter 2002, pp. 26 - 32.
- 12 "U.S. Signs Agreement for International Test and Evaluation Program for Humanitarian Demining," U.S. Dept. of State Media Note, July 17, 2000.
- 13 "Milestones in Humanitarian Demining."
- 14 "Lusaka Protocol End Marks Start of New Era in Angola," U.S. Dept. of State Press Statement by Philip T. Reeker, Deputy Spokesman, November 22, 2002.
- 15 Slovenian International Trust Fund for Demining and Victims Assistance, Appendix D, "To Walk the Earth in Safety," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs annual report Fourth Edition, September 2002.
- 16 "Public-Private Partnerships: Toward a Mine-Safe World," catalog of the Office of Mine Action Initiatives and Partnerships, Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, U.S. Department of State, September 2002.



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