



Landmines and Unexploded Ordnance A Lasting Legacy of Despair

(Donald F. (Pat) Patierno)

Long after a conflict is over, an insidious peril continues to threaten the lives of war-torn populations and hampers the economic and social recovery of affected nations.

The United Nations Mine Action Service estimates that, each year, between 15,000 and 20,000 people are killed or injured by landmines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) from past conflicts in more than 75 countries.

A landmine is a type of self-contained explosive device that is placed on or into the ground, exploding when triggered by a vehicle, person or an animal. Unexploded ordnance, or UXO, refers to explosive weapons (bombs, grenades, shells, naval mines, other munitions) that did not explode when they were deployed, and still pose a risk of detonation many decades after they were used or discarded.

While the actual number of landmines is less significant than the lives and land affected by them, it is useful to have an estimate as a common denominator. A 2001 State Department Report, "Hidden Killers," which was based on data provided by U.S. embassies in mine-affected countries, estimated the number of emplaced landmines at between 45 and 55 million; more recent estimates offer only slightly lower numbers.

The amount of unexploded ordnance is incalculable. And trying to put a number on either category of these devices is, at best, an exercise that would yield unreliable results simply because it is impossible for anyone to know.

Since 1997, when the Ottawa Treaty to ban landmines first was signed, there has been considerable progress in clearing landmines and unexploded ordnance from affected countries. Moreover, the use of landmines has been drastically reduced, although the prestigious Landmine Monitor Report suggests, in its most recent (2006) publication, that at least three governments and several non-State actors continue to use landmines. The three governments are Myanmar (Burma), Nepal

and Russia. Non-State actors continue to deploy landmines in Burma, Burundi, Colombia, Guinea-Bissau, India, Iraq, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia (Chechnya) and Somalia.

What is more significant than actual numbers is the impact these devices have on nearby towns and villages and the livelihoods of the people. In addition to direct victims, the mere presence of landmines and UXO:

- Impedes access to fertile agricultural fields, leading to food scarcity and malnutrition related diseases.
- Inhibits access to forested areas limiting the amount of available wood for use as fuel and further exacerbating the problem of malnutrition.
- Limits access to safe water sources, thus increasing incidents of waterborne diseases such as cholera and dysentery.
- Prevents or inhibits the delivery of important medical services such as routine vaccination services, disrupting programs designed to prevent tuberculosis, measles, malaria and other childhood diseases.
- Hampers economic and cultural development.
- Limits social interaction.

One of the core elements of the 1997 Ottawa Treaty is the requirement for the parties to the Treaty to assist mine-affected nations in clearing landmines, reducing casualties, and providing assistance to survivors. The international community has responded extremely well, led by the United States, which is not a signatory to the Ottawa Treaty, but nevertheless has provided nearly \$1.2 billion in support of mine action since 1993.

Other than saving lives and limbs, there are compelling reasons for the international community to engage in humanitarian mine action. Over time, such engagement contributes to internal and regional stability, thus reducing the likelihood of further conflict and greater damage to infrastructure, economies and culture. The removal of landmines and UXO allows the free movement of people, as well as goods and services, and allows the cultivation of land and the production and sale of that land's bounty, thus improving the ability of a nation to feed itself and to strengthen its economic opportunity.

Donor nations, including the United States, have engaged with commercial and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as with the militaries of mine-affected nations, to deliver a broad portfolio of mine action services.

Mine action is not limited to landmines. While emplaced landmines remain a serious threat, unexploded ordnance, including cluster munitions, poses an equal or greater threat. So, with funds provided by donor governments and the private sector, mine action "practitioners" from various militaries, commercial, and non-governmental sectors address all explosive remnants of war, including abandoned ordnance, when they conduct any aspect of mine action. (Note: Militaries engaged in humanitarian mine action tend to be from affected

countries. The U.S. military does not conduct humanitarian mine action operations, although it does train military personnel from other countries and it does conduct research into promising detection technologies.)

The various pillars of mine action are:

- Locating, removing or destroying in place landmines and other remnants of war. This would include surveying and mapping, as well as marking or fencing areas believed to contain such devices.
- Educating the local population, especially children, on the risks of landmines and unexploded ordnance and what to do should they come in contact with such devices.
- Assistance to survivors to include medical treatment, immediate and long-term rehabilitative services, prosthetic support, skills training, and, in many cases, direct assistance (e.g. micro-loans, grants, specialized job-related equipment, etc.)

While commercial companies have played a role in helping to clear landmines and unexploded ordnance, especially in the immediate aftermath of a conflict, the leading practitioners of mine action remain non-governmental organizations dedicated to humanitarian causes and committed to the need to develop an indigenous capacity to address the problem over the long-term.

The list of non-governmental organizations involved in humanitarian mine action is too long to be included here. Suffice it to say that all do meaningful and deeply appreciated work. The organization I represent is the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance (ITF).

The ITF is a humanitarian, non-profit organization established by the Slovenian Government in March 1998 to channel donations from public and private donors to help Bosnia and Herzegovina in solving its landmine problem and to help survivors of landmine and UXO incidents with physical and socio-economic rehabilitation. The ITF quickly expanded its sphere of operations to other mine-affected countries in South-Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, as well as to Cyprus and Lebanon. More recently, the ITF, at the behest of the Government of Slovenia, has been providing assistance to Colombia and Lebanon, and will soon engage in Vietnam, Libya and Kazakhstan.

The ITF enjoys a unique relationship with the U.S. Department of State, which, in accordance with congressional legislation enacted in 1998 and renewed annually, provides \$10 million each year in matching grants.

International donors, including the United Nations, have come to appreciate the advantages of channeling funds through the ITF to support their mine action objectives. The primary advantage, of course, is the matching funds that their donations could engender, compliments of the United States Government. In addition, donors enjoy the following advantages:

- Clearance priorities are established by the mine affected nation and provided to the ITF, assuring that the locally identified highest priorities are met first.
- The donor determines how its funds will be used, usually coordinating its objectives with that of the mine affected nation.
- The ITF maintains transparent management control over all funds it administers and undergoes annual audits in accordance with international accounting standards. Such controls include the competition of clearance projects through a rigid tendering and bidding process that mirrors competitive processes employed by the U.S. Government and the European Union countries.
- The ITF monitors all activities on behalf of the donor and provides periodic reports on progress.

Since it was founded in 1998, the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance, on behalf of its donors, has administered projects that:

- Cleared more than 72.5 million square meters of land that was returned for agricultural use (56%); the resettlement of refugees and internally displaced persons (24%); and the reconstruction of infrastructure (19%); and other uses (1%).
- Removed or destroyed more than 55,000 explosive devices.
- Provided rehabilitative services to more than 925 survivors through programs at the Slovenian Institute of Rehabilitation and at various rehabilitation centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Provided medical equipment to a regional medical center in Albania and helped to renovate a rehabilitation clinic in Croatia.
- Provided advanced rehabilitation training to more than 400 medical personnel from the Balkan and Caucasus states.
- Allowed more than 1,000 child mine victims to attend special rehabilitation “summer camps.”
- Provided direct assistance to more than 1,000 survivors.
- Provided direct mine risk education to more than 60,000 school children and indirect risk education to more than 110,000 family members through sports activities, school programs, concerts and special mine risk education sessions.
- Trained more than 180 mine clearance technicians and national mine action management personnel.
- Co-sponsored two international conferences on the use of mine detection dogs.
- In cooperation with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, conducted regional mine action workshops in Georgia and Kazakhstan.

To engender interest among donors in the United States, the ITF has partnered with the Marshall Legacy Institute, which is based in Arlington, Virginia. MLI is

a non-profit, 501(c)(3) international humanitarian organization established to extend the legacy of George C. Marshall into the 21st Century, specifically to assist countries in easing the scourge of landmines. MLI provides mine detection dogs, management training, and mine awareness education to reduce suffering and restore hope to people, especially children, in war-torn countries. MLI also uses innovative technologies to improve the quality of life of landmine survivors.

The International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims' Assistance (ITF) and the Marshall Legacy Institute (MLI) have joined forces to provide assistance to populations and countries recovering from the harsh impact of armed conflict. Both organizations have funded numerous projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Croatia over the last decade. The two organizations plan additional joint projects in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Armenia, Lebanon, and elsewhere.

I would add that Rotary Clubs from around the world have supported mine action. Your fellow Rotarians in District 7620 have supported a project to provide prosthetic devices to war victims in Basra, Iraq. Rotarians from California joined with Rotarians in Karlovac, Croatia to clear a minefield in that country. Other examples of support from Rotary Clubs abound.

To put it in a nutshell, the international community and mine affected nations themselves have accomplished much over the last decade or so. Much more, however, remains to be done and help is needed to do so.

Donations to the ITF either directly (www.itf-fund.si) or through the Marshall Legacy Institute (www.marshall-legacy.org). Donations made to the ITF through MLI should clearly be labeled "For the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance."

About the Author: Donald F. (Pat) Patierno retired from the U.S. State Department in 2006 after logging 38 years of Federal service. His first exposure to humanitarian mine action came in 1995 when he headed the Administrative Support Team on the U.S. Delegation to the first-ever international conference on landmines. He later served as the Washington-based program manager of the U.S. demining program in Bosnia-Herzegovina and subsequently became the Director of the State Department's Office of Humanitarian Demining Programs, which funded humanitarian mine action initiatives in 44 countries. His last Federal position as the Executive Director of the State Department's Bureau of Public Affairs allowed him to travel extensively throughout the United States, educating the American public on the landmine problem around the world. He currently serves as the U.S. Advocate for the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance and serves on the Board of Directors of MAG, America, a Washington-based mine action non-governmental organization.

Addendum



Rotarians for Mine Action (www.rfma.org)

Rotarians for Mine Action was formed as a result of meetings of Rotarians at the Barcelona Rotary International Convention in 2002, the Seattle Landmines Conference in October 2002, and the Brisbane Rotary International Convention in 2003.

- A voluntary non-for-profit association dedicated to building awareness amongst Rotarians and Rotaractors involved in efforts to rid the world of landmines and to assist landmine victims
- Formed as a result of meetings of Rotarians at the Barcelona Rotary International Convention, Seattle Landmines Conference in October 2002, and the Brisbane Rotary International Convention
- Operates in accordance with the policies of Rotary International, but is neither an agent nor is it controlled by Rotary International.

Purposes:

1. Increase Rotarians and Rotaractors awareness and knowledge of landmine related issues
2. Encourage Rotarians/Rotaractors to support Humanitarian Mine Action Projects to:

- Promote landmine risk education in countries afflicted with landmines/UXO
- Support the removal and decommissioning of landmines,
- Provide survivor assistance to landmine victims and their families, and
- Support the rebuilding of sustainable community development in landmine cleared

