Mine-action Challenges and Responses in Georgia

Following an international conflict in 2008, Georgia faces a greater threat from landmines and explosive remnants of war than that posed by previous violence. In response to this threat, Georgia, with assistance provided by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA) and the Government of Canada, created national bodies to coordinate and implement landmine and ERW clearance. This article documents Georgia’s past ERW, landmine and cluster-munitions contamination, as well as efforts to remove these threats.

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Georgia is party to the Convention on the Prohibition on the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and their Destruction (also known as the Anti-personnel Mine Ban Convention or APMbC), and acceded to Protocol V on ERW on 22 December 2008 and to Amended Protocol II on Landmines on 8 June 2009.

According to Article 6 of the Georgia Law on International Treaties, international treaties are an integral part of Georgian legislation, and the provisions of these treaties establish specific rights and obligations that are enacted directly without requiring adoption of additional laws or regulations.1

Landmines and ERW in Georgia

The landmine problem in Georgia is primarily a result of landmine use around former Soviet/Russian military bases along international borders and from conflicts with the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.2 Georgia had neither the authority nor the responsibility to clear these bases while they remained under Russian control. However, Russia transferred the last of the military bases located in Georgia to Georgian authority in November 2007, allowing authorities to begin clearance operations.3

In addition to landmines, Georgia is faced with unexploded cluster submunitions that targeted areas in Poti harbor, Kopitmani, Batumi (Black Sea coast) and around Tbilisi contributed to an increased ERW threat and impact. The increased ERW contamination added to prior problems that Georgia faced from legacy Soviet/Russian minefields, as well as the existing ERW threat in the Abkhazia region.4

Legend

• Russian checkpoint
• All graphics courtesy of ERWCC Georgia

Russian checkpoint

All graphics courtesy of ERWCC Georgia

Level of ERW, landmine and cluster-munition contamination in Georgia as of November 2010.
Currently the threat of ERW, cluster munitions and landmines around former military facilities and in some border areas outside the South Ossetia borders continues to endanger the civilian population. Furthermore, potentially productive land is unusable due to the contamination, preventing the government from undertaking numerous socioeconomic development projects. These projects include agricultural development in the Shida Kartli region and tourism expansion on the Black Sea and at important religious sites, such as Makheta. On the other hand, the HALO Trust completed clearance of Abkhazia and a ceremony was held on 6 November 2011 to acknowledge completion of this project.

Norwegian People’s Aid conducted a General Mine Action Assessment funded by the International Trust Fund for Demining and Mine Victims Assistance. Between October 2009 and January 2010 the governments of Hungary and the Czech Republic funded this assessment through IFTF. The GMMA identified eight suspected hazardous areas and seven confirmed hazardous areas in 13 districts, the latter of which totaled more than an estimated 4.5 square kilometers (1.73 square miles).

Mine-action Coordination in Georgia

Immediately following the August 2008 conflict many international humanitarian-aid agencies rallied to provide emergency response support. Several international organizations, including the European Union Monitoring Mission, the International Committee of the Red Cross, ITF and the International Campaign to Ban Landmines - Georgia, engaged international humanitarian-aid agencies to provide assistance to national authorities in HMA activities, as well as for Georgia to establish national HMA standards and technical safety guidelines derived from the International Mine Action Standards.

On 23 October 2008, the Georgian Ministry of Defence and the Slovenia-based IFTF signed a two-year Memorandum of Understanding on HMA assistance. IFTF initiated a national capacity building program in January 2009 that followed the General Mine Action Assessment funded by the International Mine Action Standards. The program focused on providing assistance to national authorities in HMA capacity building.

ERSWCC Operations

iMMAP engaged the Ministries of Defence and Interior Affairs through Memorandum of Understandings and worked closely with other Georgian authorities. ERWCC became the Georgian entity tasked to coordinate and execute ERW mitigation and is responsible for external quality assurance/security. The organization has conducted at least 40 hazardous area assessments after Russian troops withdrew from the village at the western border with South Ossetia on 18 October 2010. Russian forces in the Perevi area controlled the main road in Perevi village, which links nearby South Ossetia villages to the rest of the breakaway region. ERWCC found evidence of the threat of ERW, cluster munitions and other ERW and provided this information for further action, such as mine risk education, victim assistance and clearance.

The ERWCC hosted regularly scheduled coordination meetings with all major HMA stakeholders in Georgia. These meetings were held biweekly or as requested by the parties involved. The ERWCC continued to coordinate HMA activities in Georgia, as well as conduct QA/QC and act as the national HMA authority. These activities and responsibilities were transferred to the Georgian Government in early 2011. During the lifespan of the ERWCC, the tasks and responsibilities that were identified included the following:

- QA/QC of demining/clearance activities
- QA/QC of unexploded ordnance and explosive hazard clearance and disposal
- Battle-area clearance
- Mine-risk education
- ERW information management from any conflict or source
- Community liaison
- Stockpile reduction
- Advocacy

The ERWCC hosted regularly scheduled coordination meetings with all major HMA stakeholders in Georgia. These stakeholders included international NGOs, the Georgian Red Cross, the Georgian Ministries of Defence and Interior, and the Georgian Army Brigade of Engineers. These meetings were held biweekly or as requested by the parties involved for the purpose of synchronizing and monitoring HMA activities. ERWCC also established mechanisms to assist other NGOs and international institutions (United Nations agencies, EU Monitoring Mission, etc.). When suspected contamination is reported and rapid assessments are required, clearance plans are made jointly with the appropriate stakeholders. ERWCC conducted several risk-assessment missions during 2009 to survey potential new hazardous areas. An example is Perevi village, where the Ministries of Defence and Interior requested that the ERWCC conduct an ERW hazard assessment after Russian troops withdrew from the village at the western border with South Ossetia on 18 October 2010. Russian forces in the Perevi area controlled the main road in Perevi village, which links nearby South Ossetia villages to the rest of the breakaway region. ERWCC found evidence of the use of cluster munitions and other ERW and provided this information for further action, such as mine risk education, victim assistance and clearance.

Transition and Georgian Ownership

On 30 December 2010 the Georgian Ministry of Defence issued a decree instructing that HMA be included as part of a Ministry body known as the State Military Scientific Technical Center, or DELTA. DELTA has now assumed the...
Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-first Century: Principles, Methods, and Approaches

by Jacob Bercovitch and Richard Jackson
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In Conflict Resolution in the Twenty-first Century: Principles, Methods, and Approaches, Bercovitch and Jackson create an accessible and well-organized analysis of the best approaches to resolving conflicts in the world today. Emphasizing fundamental changes in the nature of conflict following the Cold War, the authors present the argument that conflict resolution must also change. Their analysis characterizes pre-1991 conflicts as primarily interstate conflicts or power struggles between states and insurgents, overseen and manipulated by the major powers. According to the authors, the collapse of the Soviet Union saw “the proliferation of ethnic, religious, cultural, and resource-driven conflicts as major threats to international peace.” This shift rendered traditional methods of resolving conflicts practically obsolete, forcing innovative thinking to produce a new understanding of peace building.

Bercovitch and Jackson, both from the University of Canterbury, New Zealand, describe traditional approaches—international negotiation, conflict mediation, arbitration and adjudication, U.N. conflict resolution, and peacekeeping—and explain how these methods must evolve to meet the needs of the modern world. They analyze new methods—preventive diplomacy, humanitarian intervention, regional task-forces, and assisting with international and subnational pro-processes—international negotiation, conflict mediation, arbitration and adjudication, U.N. conflict resolution, and peacekeeping—and explain how these methods must evolve to meet the needs of the modern world. They analyze new methods—preventive diplomacy, humanitarian intervention, regional task-forces, and assisting with international and subnational groups to produce a new understanding of peace building.

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