On 1 October 2014, an explosion rocked the Midzhur munitions-disposal factory 120 km (75 miles) north of Sofia, Bulgaria, leaving nothing but smoking craters where the factory once stood. Secondary explosions continued throughout the night destroying the factory that dismantles stockpiles of obsolete munitions for the Bulgarian army. A total of 15 workers were killed and three were wounded. The Midzhur factory also had incidents in 2007 and 2010. In 2008, a series of explosions at an arms depot outside of Sofia resulted in seismic activity measuring 3.2 on the Richter scale. In 2012, three people were killed after an explosion at a disposal facility near Sliven.

Small Arms Survey, a research group in Geneva, Switzerland, found that the number of incidental munitions-depot explosions has risen significantly in the last 35 years. It discovered that accidental explosions have been reported at a rate of 26.8 incidents per year since 2010, up significantly since 4.3 incidents were reported per year during the 1980s. Contributing to the rise in incidents are stockpiles of weapons procured and deployed during the Cold War. The obsolete munitions are becoming unstable and handling the weapons leads to a higher occurrence of accidents. As a result, the international community has increased support for managing and disposing of these explosive devices.

~ Patrick Shea, CISR staff

Endnotes