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Kosovo After the UNMACC and Beyond

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Kosovo, After the UNMACC and Beyond

Over the past few years, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre (UNMACC) has transferred mine action responsibilities to national organizations within Kosovo. The following article discusses how a number of different agencies within Kosovo are working together in various capacities to address mine action issues.

by Steve Saunders, Chief of EOD Management Section, UNMIK

Background

After the end of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bombing campaign and the cessation of hostilities in the province of Kosovo, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) mandated the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) implement a mine action program in Kosovo. On June 17, 1999, the responsibility for mine action in Kosovo was handed to UNMACC under UN resolution 1244.

UNMACC

From June 17, 1999, to December 15, 2001, UNMACC took on the responsibility of managing and coordinating humanitarian mine clearance operations in Kosovo. During the emergency and consolidation phases

of the mine action program, up to 17 accredited NGOs and commercial companies worked in Kosovo with support from the Kosovo Forces (KFOR), the humanitarian community and international donors. In the two and a half years of existence in Kosovo, UNMACC mine action programs accomplished the following:

- Destroyed 24,972 AT and AP mines
- Destroyed 8,485 cluster munitions
- Destroyed 13,896 items of UXO
- Cleared 32,224,107 square metres of land

However, since the start of the mine action program in Kosovo, there were also 459 reported incidents involving mines and items of UXO, which resulted in 95 deaths and 364 people sustaining serious injuries.

Timeline for Transfer of Responsibility

June 2001

In June 2001, an assessment of the situation concluded that the mine action program was at the point where the national capacity could take on the continued clearance of UXO and mines and eventually the role of explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) response. The decision was made to transfer responsibility for UXO and mine clearance to the national capacity, the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC). As soon as this decision was agreed upon, an exit strategy was drawn up between UNMACC and the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).

December 2001

On December 15, 2001, the transfer of responsibility moved from UNMACC to UNMIK. At the time of the transfer, the Kosovo mine action program had cleared 619 of the 620 known Serbian Army (VJ) minefield records and as a minimum conducted clearance to some degree on the 224 reported NATO cluster strikes. The exit strategy also transferred various responsibilities that UNMACC was conducting to local government departments in-line with the UNMIK mandate to develop the national capacity. The transfer of responsibilities gave the following organizations various roles for mine action within Kosovo.

Organizations and Their Responsibilities After the Transfer

- Office of Kosovo Protection Corp Coordinator (OKPCC): The overall focal point for mine action in Kosovo with management and oversight role of the KPC EOD teams.

- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST): Implements mine risk education (MRE) in schools and in specific areas where a residual threat from mines or UXO may still be present.

- Institute of Public Health (IPH): Collects and stores information regarding victims of mines and UXO as well as investigates all UXO and mine-related reports where an injury has occurred.

- Department of Labour and Social Welfare: Provides continued Victim Assistance (VA) and rehabilitation for UXO and mine victims.

Initially, the transfer of responsibilities to the various ministries and governmental departments did not go as smoothly as planned. The sections

within the government bodies that were tasked with the new roles were not trained or equipped in the early stages of the transfer. The EOD management section also suffered slightly due to restructuring within UNMIK and the office responsible went through three name changes within nine months. However, since September 19, 2002, the EOD management section has been working within the OKPCC.

OKPCC

The OKPCC is split into various subsections such as Procurement, Infrastructure, Logistics and Support, Administration and Finance, Operations and EOD management. The EOD management section is responsible for the KPC EOD teams and remains the focal point for all mine action and EOD in Kosovo. As the focal point for EOD matters, the EOD management section is responsible for:

- Operational coordination and management of all KPC EOD activities, including implementation of quality assurance (QA) procedures and the development of a QA capability.
- The development of the KPC EOD response capability and continued training and supervision of the KPC EOD teams.
- Public information and mine risk education (MRE) relating to the residual mine/UXO threat and the appropriate action to be taken by the public.
- Victim assistance in conjunction with the IPH.

- Maintenance of the technical guidelines and International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) for UXO clearance operations in Kosovo.

- Management of the Information Management System for Mine Action (IMSMA).

OKPCC EOD Management Section

Under existing arrangements, the EOD management section consists of two international personnel and five local staff. The two international employees fill the roles of Operations Officer and QA Officer and the five national staff posts are:

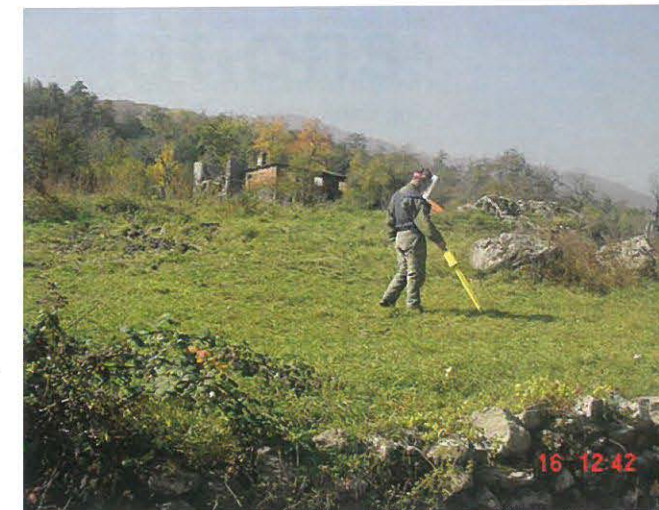
- Two QA assistants
- One MRE assistant
- One Mine Public Information assistant
- One Data Entry clerk/radio operator

Mine Risk Education (MRE)

The long-term strategy to keep the population safe is effective MRE and public information on the residual threat, and the appropriate action to be taken by the public upon finding a suspicious object or finding themselves in a dangerous area. The MRE assistant coordinates MRE in schools in conjunction with MEST. The MRE assistant also monitors and reports on the KPC community liaison teams and delivers MRE messages to any community or government institute that requests it.

Public Information

The public information assistant delivers public information through the media in conjunction with the UNMIK public information department, KFOR and the KPC. The public information assistant is also responsible for the collection, investigation and validation of all information pertaining to UXO and mines found by the public in Kosovo.



KPC deminer performing mine detection task.

Victim Assistance

IPH is the government institute that is the focal point for data collection on any new victims of mines or UXO. Both the MRE and the public information assistant are responsible for assisting the IPH in gathering data and investigating incidents as they occur, as well as ensuring confidentiality of the victim's data. When necessary, they will also visit victims and their families to provide reports, feedback and continued support.

Other Areas of Achievement

In March 2003, the MRE and public information assistants conducted a Kosovo-wide "Needs Assessment" with a local NGO, ARKA. This "Needs Assessment" has highlighted the best type of media to reach the majority of the population and areas where MRE and public information have not been previously provided. The MRE and public information assistants also completed the "Safer Village Plan" and the "Normal Life" projects that were started by the UNMACC in 2001.

Information Management and IMSMA

Kosovo was the first mine action programme to have an IMSMA system, which was developed by the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD). The IMSMA system stores and records information regarding any UXO or mine clearance that has been conducted in Kosovo in its database. The



Team leader of PZ 3 EOD team Gani Shabanaj destroying a BLU 97.

KPC conducting battle area clearance tasks, while being supervised by Handicap International.



Landmines in Europe & the Caucasus

information can then be displayed by superimposing the information onto mapping using various themes to represent the types of UXO and mine clearance that has been, or will be conducted. One of the functions of the UNMIK EOD management section is the administration of the IMSMA system; KFOR and sections of the humanitarian community have been using IMSMA since it was first introduced in 1999. Any new information regarding dangerous areas that are reported by KFOR or areas that are cleared by the KPC or NGOs can be entered into the system and updated immediately.

KPC

The KPC is a civil protection organisation that has been working in Kosovo since February 2000. They are split into various subdivisions such as Communications, Emergency Preparedness, Training and Doctrine, Infrastructure Repair and Engineering. The KPC EOD teams are all members of the engineer units within each region, known as a Protection Zone. There are currently six Protection Zones within the Province of Kosovo; each zone has an EOD team and the headquarters of the engineers also have an EOD team making seven teams in total.

Current KPC EOD Team Capability

Each KPC EOD team consists of 15 members per team, which includes:

- One team leader
- Two deputy team leaders
- Eight EOD personnel
- Two paramedics
- One dedicated ambulance driver
- One Community Liaison Officer (CLO)

KPC CLO

In order that the local communities are both aware and satisfied with the clearance work that is being conducted by the KPC EOD teams, 14 members of the KPC have been trained by ARKA in Community Liaison. Each CLO informs



■ KFOR teaching the KPC mine risk education.

the community about the work conducted by the KPC in their area. The CLO will inform the head of the village or landowner and when possible, organise a community meeting in the area, so that as many people as possible are informed about what areas are clear.

KPC Training and Supervision

The KPC teams training is organised and developed by the OKPCC EOD management section and currently delivered by Handicap International (HI). HI was chosen to train the KPC as they have a proven record in national capacity building. In late 2001, and early 2002, the KPC was trained in demining, battle area clearance (BAC) and limited EOD response. In early 2003, HI conducted a number of refresher courses in BAC and basic demolitions prior to any clearance operations taking place. HI plans to continue the training and development of the KPC for the foreseeable future. HI also provides international supervisors and national monitors to the sites on a daily basis as well as acting as a liaison between the KPC, KFOR and the OKPCC. In addition to this supervision and monitoring role, HI also provides a 16-person BAC team, which is currently funded by UNMAS. The HI team works independently of the KPC on BAC sites in conjunction with the Kosovo clearance plan.

Future Capability of the KPC EOD Teams

KFOR is downsizing their troop strength in Kosovo and the KPC will continue to take over the role of EOD re-

sponse from KFOR in the future. By the end of 2004, the KPC should have a fully functional operations cell that mirrors the EOD management sections in Pristina. The EOD teams should be capable of operating quick reaction EOD response teams that can operate Kosovo-wide and are able to dispose of the majority of Land Service Ammunition and items of UXO that are reported by the Kosovo Police Service, KFOR and members of the public. Additionally, the KPC teams should also be capable of continuing to conduct BAC operations throughout Kosovo when not employed on EOD response tasks and be capable of conducting technical surveys to verify or discredit the presence of any items of UXO or mines reported by members of the public on land that is having a socio-economic impact on the population in the Province of Kosovo.

Current Situation (Mid-June 2003)

Currently in Kosovo, there are 129 dangerous areas that require a minimum of either a technical survey or some form of mine or BAC. However, these dangerous areas are not new; in fact, 120 of these were handed over to UNMIK when the UNMACC transferred responsibility in 2001. The majority of these dangerous areas are contaminated with subsurface cluster munitions dropped by NATO in 1999. The remaining dangerous areas contain mines and items of UXO. Additionally, there are over 50 suspicious areas that require a technical survey to discredit or verify the presence of any mines or UXO. These areas have been reported by KFOR, the ICRC and members of the public to the EOD management section in the last 18 months and were not previously known to the UNMACC.

There are still areas within Kosovo that are affected by mines and UXO and although there has been a gradual decline in the number of victims over the last two years since the closure of the UNMACC, there are still incidents reported on a regular basis most notably incidents involving children. In 2002, the EOD management section and the IPH gathered

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incident reports involving a total of 16 people, of which eight people were killed and eight seriously injured. Of the 16 reported incidents, 11 involved children. Up to mid June 2003, there have been ten reported incidents so far, of these three people have been killed and ten seriously injured, six of these incidents involved children. Most of the incidents since 2002 have been due to the victims tampering with items of UXO, most commonly cluster bombs and grenades.

Clearance Since Transfer of Responsibilities

Since the transfer of responsibilities in 2001, the KPC EOD teams and HI have cleared the following items of ordnance:

- 11 AT and AP mines
- 257 cluster munitions
- 33 items of UXO

• 344,139 square metres of land cleared
KFOR has continued to conduct EOD response tasks reported by members of the public and the police and have recovered a large number of items of UXO from all the Multi-National Brigade areas as follows:

- 267 AT and AP mines
- 340 cluster munitions
- 5,861 items of UXO

Future Vision for Kosovo

In the future, the responsibility for UXO and mine clearance in Kosovo will be transferred from UNMIK to the national authority with the KPC EOD teams taking on the responsibility for EOD response when KFOR has downsized. The KPC EOD teams training and development is progressing to a point where it is hoped that by the end of 2004 the EOD management section

will be able to hand over operational control of the day to day running of the EOD teams to the KPC Chief Engineer. It is hoped that the remaining suspicious and dangerous areas will have been surveyed and either discredited or reduced to EOD response tasks, and MRE and public information messages, targeted at schools will hopefully reduce the number of incidents, especially those that involve children. ■

**All graphics courtesy of the author.*

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