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# A Critical Look at the Commercialization of Afghan Demining

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# GOLDMINE?

## A Critical Look at the Commercialization of Afghan Demining



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## *Contents*

## *Acronyms*

| | |
|---|---|
| ADG | Afghan Demining Group |
| AMAC | Area Mine Action Center |
| ATC | Afghan Technical Consultants |
| BAC | Battle Area Clearance |
| CBHA | USAID Cross-Border Humanitarian Assistance Program for Afghanistan |
| CIA | US Central Intelligence Agency |
| DAFA | Demining Agency for Afghanistan |
| DSL | Defense Systems Limited |
| EOD | Explosive Ordnance Disposal |
| EODT | EOD Technology, Inc. |
| GICHD | Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining |
| HALO Trust | Hazardous Area Life-support Organisation Trust |
| HID | Hemayatbrothers International Demining |
| IED | Improvised Explosive Device |
| IMAS | International Mine Action Standards |
| IMSMA | Information Management System for Mine Action |
| ISI | Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence |
| MAG | Mines Advisory Group |
| MANPADS | Man-portable air defense systems |
| MAPA | Mine Action Program for Afghanistan |
| MCPA | Clearance and Planning Agency |
| MDC | Mine Dog Center |
| META | Monitoring Evaluation and Training Agency |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| OMA | Organization for Mine Awareness |
| OMAR | Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation |
| PPE | Personal Protective Equipment |
| RONCO | RONCO Consulting Corporation |
| SOP | Standing Operating Procedures |
| SWAAD | South West Afghan Agency for Demining |
| UNDP | UN Development Programme |
| UNHCR | UN High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNICEF | UN Children's Fund |
| UNMACA | UN Mine Action Center for Afghanistan |
| UNMAS | UN Mine Action Service |
| UNOPS | UN Office for Project Services |
| UNOCHA | UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| USAID | US Agency for International Development |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| UXB | UXB International |
| UXO | Unexploded ordnance |
| WRA | US State Department Office for Weapons Removal and Abatement |
| WWII | World War II |

## *Executive Summary*

Afghan demining is in a period of momentous change. After 16 years of UN-led and NGO-implemented mine action, the last two years have seen the influx of commercial demining companies. This has the potential to enhance the capacity of Afghan demining, through greater profit-driven efficiency, innovation and specialization. Moreover, it is unlikely that many NGOs would be able, or willing, to do mine and UXO clearance tasks for the Coalition and Afghan militaries. Thus some involvement of commercial companies in Afghan demining should be welcomed. However, there are also possible disadvantages to commercialization:

1) Without tight controls and a clear regulatory framework, using commercial companies risks lowering the quality and safety of the demining process,
2) Turning demining into a purchasable commodity risks drawing demining resources away from those who need mine clearance the most, as those who can pay get demining first,
3) Commercialization, which has seen the growing role of private security contractors in demining, has occurred in tandem with the merging of US aid and security policy in Afghanistan. As a result, there is a danger that neutral 'humanitarian space' for demining may be reduced.

Acknowledging that to a large degree commercialization is a *fait accompli*, the author has the following recommendations:

*To UNMACA:*

1. Build confidence in the UN-led system by addressing weaknesses in transparency and perceptions of unnecessary bureaucratic inertia.
2. Continue with organizational reform to improve donor reporting, transparency, better data collection and operational efficiency.
3. Commission a study into the economic, political and social impacts of the commercialization of demining in Afghanistan, and ways to make best use of the commercial potential.
4. Rapidly expand the capacity of the quality management structure of UNMACA and centralize the reporting from these teams in a headquarters database.
5. Improve the demining accident database and integrate this into IMSMA (Information Management System for Mine Action) properly.
6. Collate and analyze the quality management and accident data regularly and take accreditation away from organization that have consistently poor safety records.
7. Fundraise aggressively to maintain the humanitarian demining capacity at its current level.
8. Strengthen the NGO sector by encouraging transparency, building technical capacity and introducing elements of moderate competition for grants, so they are able to stem the hemorrhaging of talent to commercial companies.

*To the agencies of the US government:*

1. Maintain some funding for the UN-led system, conditional on improvements in transparency, efficiency and data reporting.
2. Support a UN-commissioned study into the economic, political and social impacts of the commercialization of demining in Afghanistan.
3. Ensure that reconstruction demining contractors are penalized for poor safety practices.
4. Strengthen the NGO sector by encouraging transparency, building technical capacity and introducing elements of moderate competition for grants, so they are able to stem the hemorrhaging of talent to commercial companies.
5. Give security clearance to more UNMACA quality management inspectors to observe the work of commercial contractors in Coalition secure areas.
6. Include tight caveat in commercials contracts emphasizing and ensuring the power of UNMACA is maintained. Ensure that contracts mandate submission of all clearance and accident data to them in a timely manner.
7. Be cautious about introducing commercialization into other demining programs in other countries.

*To other bilateral donors:*

1. Maintain and bolster funding for the UN-led demining system, conditional on improvements in transparency, operational efficiency and data reporting.
2. Support a UN-commissioned study into the economic, political and social impacts of the commercialization of demining in Afghanistan.
3. Include tight caveats in commercials contracts emphasizing and ensuring the power of UNMACA is maintained. Ensure that contracts mandate submission of all clearance and accident data to them in a timely manner.
4. Be cautious about introducing commercialization into other demining programs in other countries.

*To prime reconstruction contractors:*

1. Improve coordination with UNMACA, make sure they are fully aware of all demining and BAC contracts.
2. Include tight caveats in commercials contracts emphasizing and ensuring the power of UNMACA is maintained. Ensure that contracts mandate submission of all clearance and accident data to them in a timely manner.
3. Consider making client-provided private quality assurance inspection reports available in one central location (ideally UNMACA) so information on contractor performance is available to all clients.

*To commercial demining companies:*

1. Improve coordination with UNMACA, make sure they are fully aware of all demining and BAC operations, and submit all clearance and accident data to them in a timely manner.
2. Resist the temptation to cut corners in the SOPs, or to speed up the demining process beyond what is safe.

3. Consider the negative implications of using a private security capacity and having employees bearing arms, and the impact on the image of all demining agencies.
4. Go first to the pool of unemployed deminers for labor, rather than hiring talent away the Afghan NGOs. Consider setting payscales at an appropriate level, in consultation with UNMACA.

*To the Afghan NGOs:*

1. Build donor confidence by continuing to improve transparency, technical competence and management capacity.
2. Consider adopting some of the new technologies and innovations brought into the country by commercial operators.
3. Deal with the tough question of how the Afghan Demining Group's (ADG) profits will be distributed among the five NGOs and make a legal, written agreement.
4. Maintain close supervision over ADG to ensure it maintains the highest possible standards of clearance.

## 1. Introduction

Afghanistan is considered the birthplace of humanitarian mine action. The demining methods and protocols developed in the early 1990s by the US Agency for International Development (USAID), HALO Trust and UN, through adapting military mine breaching and explosive detection techniques, were exported to mine-affected countries all over the globe. In addition to being the oldest humanitarian demining program, the Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA) is also the biggest, employing almost 10,000 people at its peak a couple years ago.

However, Afghan demining is in a period of momentous change. After 16 years of UN-led and NGO-implemented mine action, the last two years have seen the influx of seven international commercial demining companies. With encouragement from USAID and the US State Department, and approval from the UN Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (UNMACA), the five main local demining NGOs are also spinning off commercial operations. Surprisingly, despite US rhetoric extolling the benefits of commercialization, there has been remarkably little research or analysis into who will benefit from such a drastic system change, how it will affect the implementation of mine clearance, and whether there are safety implications.

This paper aims to provide such analysis, and is part of a broader multi-country investigation by the author, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council, into the politics, policy and governance of demining.[1] The overarching assumption of this project is that the political and economic organization of demining has an impact on the quality, safety and efficiency of the process. The author thus believes that mine action policymakers in Afghanistan must be politically and economically aware, for as the studies in New Institutional Economics show, 'institutions matter' – the rules of the game do impact outcomes. In addition to a comprehensive literature review and interviews with key players in Washington DC and New York, this particular paper is the result of two months fieldwork in Kabul, Afghanistan. The author interviewed almost 40 officials in all the major demining organizations in Afghanistan, observed several demining sites and collected quantitative data where possible.

Aside from this study, there has been some discussion of the comparative advantages of commercial companies versus NGOs, or tender versus grant funding, within the mine action community, but the literature is often anecdotal, focused only on individual case studies and far from conclusive. Fitz-Gerald and Neal, for instance, argued in favor of using commercial companies (though not against NGOs), arguing they are efficient.[2] In contrast, Howell argued in favor of using NGOs, saying their humanitarian motives put them on the leading edge of advocacy efforts, developing standards and putting the community before contract.[3] However, both of these articles avoid any in-depth scholarly analysis of efficiency, quality or impact.

In an attempt to address this deficiency, Banks' 2003 article argued forcefully in favor of "a more business-like response to mine action." Using quantitative analysis he demonstrated that commercial tendering, rather than granting, mine action funding led to

[1] For a similar report presenting findings from Bosnia, see: Bolton & Griffiths 2006.
[2] Fitz-Gerald, A. & Neal, D.J. (2000) "Dispelling the Myth Between Humanitarian and Commercial Mine Action Activity." *Journal of Mine Action.* 4.3. <http://maic.jmu.edu/Journal/4.3/features/myth/myth.htm>.
[3] Howell, B. (May 1997) "NGOs perform vital role." *Landmines.* 22. pp. 10, 11, 13.

much higher productivity and lower costs in Bosnia. He argued that mine action donors had a humanitarian imperative to clear land as quickly as possible (to save lives) and thus institute competitive contracting systems.[4]

The problem with Banks' analysis was that it focused solely on judgments of speed and price. With Hugh Griffiths, this author has argued that one must also account for the quality and safety of the demining process, showing quantitative data that suggests Bosnian organizations receiving funding through tendering had more demining accidents than those that relied grants or regular public budgeting.[5] Another problem with Banks' analysis is a lack of detailed consideration of more qualitative issues. For instance, the World Bank,[6] the Geneva International Center for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD)[7] and Bolton and Griffiths[8] all warn that tendering systems can become corrupted in post-conflict countries (where mine action takes place) where there is not strong rule of law and can even strengthen a corrosive political economy of conflict. Other qualitative issues worth considering in analysis of demining commercialization include: NGOs' touted comparative advantage at interacting with local communities,[9] the vested interests international NGOs may have in avoiding local capacity building[10] and the negative perceptions of private security companies involved in demining.[11]

This policy paper will draw on this nascent literature and try to advance it, by examining the impact of commercialization on the Afghan demining sector through both quantitative and qualitative lenses, and arguing that while there are some benefits in terms of speed, lower prices, specialization and innovation:

1) Without tight controls and a clear regulatory framework, using commercial companies risks lowering the quality and safety of the demining process,
2) Turning demining into a purchasable commodity risks drawing demining resources away from those who need mine clearance the most, as those who can pay get demining first,
3) Commercialization, which has seen the growing role of private security contractors in demining, has occurred in tandem with the merging of US aid and

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[4] Banks, E. (August 2003) "In the Name of Humanity." *Journal of Mine Action*. 7.2. <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/7.2/focus/banks/banks.htm>.

[5] Bolton, M. & Griffiths, H. (September 2006) *Bosnia's Political Landmines: A Call for Socially Responsible and Conflict-Sensitive Mine Action*. London, Landmine Action. <http://www.landmineaction.org/resources/Bosnias_Political_Landmines.pdf>.

[6] Buré, J. & Pont, P. (November 2003) "Landmine Clearance Projects: A Task Manager's Guide." Social *Development Papers: Conflict Prevention & Reconstruction 10.* <http://go.worldbank.org/H9XPUBHKP0>. pp. 18-19.

[7] GICHD. (2004) *A Study of Local Organisations in Mine Action*. Geneva, GICHD. pp. 45-89.

[8] Bolton & Griffiths 2006.

[9] Maslen, S. (2004) *Mine Action After Diana: Progress in the Struggle Against Landmines*. London, Pluto Press. p. 145.

[10] GICHD 2004, pp. 65-67, 86-87.

[11] Spearin, C. (November 2001) "Ends and Means: Assessing the Humanitarian Impact of Commercialised Security on the Ottawa Convention Banning Anti-Personnel Mines." *YCISS Occasional Paper Number*. 69. More provocatively, Donovan has objected to the links certain commercial companies have to arms manufacturing: Donovan, P. (September 1997) "Making a Killing." *New Internationalist*. <http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/landmines_html/MakingKilling_NI.html>.

security policy in Afghanistan. As a result, there is a danger that neutral 'humanitarian space' for demining may be reduced.

After an overview of the history of demining in Afghanistan, the paper will explain how the processes of commercialization have occurred and briefly profile the market. The rest of the paper examines the impacts of commercialization: First, an examination of the possible benefits of commercialization, with regards to price, productivity, specialization and innovation. Second, a look at the possible problems of commercialization, including reduced safety, commodification and the use of demining to further the security interests of the US and its Coalition partners. The paper ends with some general conclusions and recommends ways to limit the risks associated with commercialization.

## *2. A Brief History of Afghan Demining*

To understand the changing structure of demining in today's Afghanistan it is important to understand that its polity did not simply drop out of heaven. This section tells the story of three distinct Afghan demining programs that began at the end of the 1980s, how the UN-led program became ascendant and absorbed the others and how the aftermath of September 11 led to a major shake up in Afghan demining.

### 2.1 The Three Roots of Afghan Demining, 1987-1994

The roots of Afghan demining lie in the significant humanitarian and strategic interest in Afghanistan at the end of 1980s. Following the Soviet invasion of the country in 1979, as much as half the population was displaced, many of them fleeing to Pakistan or Iran. Battles between the Communist government forces and the US, Saudi and Pakistan-backed rebels wrought considerable destruction to human life, infrastructure and livelihood. From 1985 onwards USAID operated a massive Cross-Border Humanitarian Assistance Program from Pakistan aimed at supporting the anti-Soviet mujahideen parties logistically (through provision of 'dual-use' assistance) and politically (by building the credibility of the parties to provide services to the populace in the 'liberated areas'). Afghanistan had also become somewhat of a *cause célèbre* across the Western and Islamic world, drawing a multitude of NGOs and philanthropists.[12] UN agencies such as UNHCR had had a prominent role in the refugee camps, but the UN response expanded suddenly in 1988 after the signing of the Geneva Accords that led to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in early 1989.

The war in Afghanistan led to staggering levels of mine contamination. Soviet forces had engaged in a massive mining campaign, littering the Afghan/Pakistan border areas with thousands of aerially dispersed butterfly mines. They also laid both anti-vehicular

[12] Coll, S.. (2004) *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and bin Laden, From the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001*. London, Penguin Books; Crile, G. (2004) *Charlie Wilson's War*. New York, Grove Press; Rubin, B.R. (2002) *The Fragmentation of Afghanistan*. 2nd Ed. New Haven, Yale University Press; Terry, F. (2002) *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action*. Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press. pp. 55-82; Harrison, S. S. (1990) "Afghanistan." *After the Wars: Reconstruction in Afghanistan, Indochina, Central America, Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa*. Lake, A. (Ed.). Washington DC, Overseas Development Council; Baitenmann, H. (January 1990) "NGOs and the Afghan War: The Politicisation of Humanitarian Aid." *Third World Quarterly*. 12(1); Wilson, C. (October 1989) "Continue U.S. Aid to Afghanistan." *The World & I*.

and anti-personnel mines to block key roads. Having developed their mine warfare doctrine in the struggle against WWII German invasion, the scale and density of these minefields was completely out of proportion and entirely inappropriate for countering a unconventional guerilla force. The mujahideen too used both improvised and imported mines to harass Soviet troop movements and protect 'liberated areas.'[13] While demining had always been considered a military issue, the high casualty rates and socio-economic blockages caused by mines became too big to ignore.

The following three subsections will outline how the three key humanitarian actors in Afghanistan – USAID, NGOs and the UN – reacted to the mine threat and shaped the development of the Afghan mine action program.

*2.1.1. USAID, RONCO and the Mine Detection Dog Center, 1988-1994*

US support to demining in Afghanistan developed in the context of the above mentioned USAID Cross-Border Humanitarian Assistance Program (CBHA), which smuggled aid from Pakistan into "liberated [mujahideen controlled] regions" of Afghanistan.[14] While cloaked in language of humanitarianism, the CBHA was closely integrated with the CIA effort supporting the mujahideen. Though the CBHA did not provide weapons, it provided 'nonlethal' assistance that was vital to the mujahideen war effort. Indeed, the CIA and USAID shared the same local counterpart, the Pakistani Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI), which made the key decisions about "who got what" assistance, both overt and covert.[15] USAID, the CIA and the ISI, as the CBHA director Larry Crandall said, "were just one big happy family."[16]

Since supplies and logistics were key strategic priorities for the mujahideen, one of the first things Crandall did was distribute "hundreds of brand-new Isuzu and Toyota trucks" to the top Afghan commanders.[17] However, USAID soon discovered that trucks were difficult to drive over the mountains, especially in winter, and so also imported 1,850 mules from Missouri, Tennessee and Arkansas. Flown in "under the cover of night," the mules were distributed to the mujahideen, under the careful watch of the ISI.[18]

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[13] For more details about the landmine situation in Afghanistan see: Survey Action Center. (2006) *Landmine Impact Survey – Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*. Takoma Park, MD, Survey Action Center. For details of how the landmine situation developed, see also: Monin, L. & Gallimore, A. (2002) *The Devil's Gardens: A History of Landmines*. London, Pimlico. pp. 162-163, 171; Croll, M. (1998) *The History of Landmines*. Barnsley, UK, Leo Cooper. pp. 125-126; Roberts, S. & Williams, J. (1995) *After the Guns Fall Silent: The Enduring Legacy of Landmines*. Washington, Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation; US Defense Intelligence Agency. (1988) "Mine Warfare in Afghanistan: A Defense Research Assessment." 88-DIA-0438 8G. Document 39223, Afghanistan Extras Unpublished Collection, Box 3, Folder 1986, George Washington University National Security Archive.

[14] USAID. (24 October 1988) "A.I.D. Strategy: Afghan Resettlement and Rehabilitation." *Development Experience Clearinghouse.* Document PN-ABR-629. <http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNABR629.pdf>. p. 7; USAID. (1 June 1989) "Afghanistan: Briefing for the Deputy Administrator-designate." *Development Experience Clearinghouse*. Document PN-ABR-629. <http://www.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNABR629.pdf>. p. 3-4.

[15] Mahan, V. (16 August 2006). Personal interview with author in Virginia, USA.
Crandall, L. (1 July 2006) Personal interview with author in McLean, Virginia, USA.

[16] Crandall 2006. cf. Lohbeck, K. (1993) *Holy War, Unholy Victory: Eyewitness to the CIA's Secret War in Afghanistan*. Washington DC, Regnery Gateway. p. 92.

[17] Crile 2004, pp. 367, 369.

[18] Mahan 2006; Local NGO Worker (6 November 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan; Hayter, D. (April 2003) "The Evolution of Mine Detection Dog Training." *Journal of Mine*

Officially, these mules were for transporting humanitarian cargo, "But no one bothered to tell the mujahideen at the border that they might be violating [US]AID rules by adding a mortar or box of AK ammo to the load."[19] As Crandall explained:

> We weren't interested in all the handholding, this was serious business. This was defeat the Soviets on their own territory and bloody their nose, and make their military lose confidence the same way our military lost confidence after Vietnam. This was tit for tat…. That's really what was going on, all this missionary crap…we didn't have time or inclination for it….[20]

As the Soviets began to pay more attention to interdicting supplies and infiltration from Pakistan, Crandall began to realize that the mines they laid posed a significant threat to his logistical system. Crandall later explained,

> You bring a mule all the way from Tennessee, you train a guy, you deploy that mule and you've got several thousand dollars of investment there right away. And if the first time it walks across the border into Afghanistan it steps on a landmine and blows its leg off, it's useless, you've got to shoot it. So we were equally interested in clearing the trails [into Afghanistan].[21]

Therefore, in his budget request for 1989, Crandall requested funding for a demining program.[22] It was approved and though Soviet troops began their withdrawal in early 1989, the Soviet-sponsored regime in Kabul clung stubbornly to power and the CBHA continued, as did the CIA effort.

The new demining program was run by RONCO Consulting Corporation, the contractor responsible for operating the whole procurement and logistical pipeline for the CBHA from 1989 onwards – a contract worth $31 million.[23] RONCO was also involved in importing the previously mentioned mules, and ran an Animal Holding Facility in Peshawar, Pakistan to train them and "teach the Afghans to load, handle, and care for the animals."[24] Dr. John Ottenburg, manager and veterinarian of the Animal Holding Facility and a former US Army colonel, had earlier been involved in a joint US and

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*Action*. Issue 7.1. <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/7.1/features/hayter/hayter.htm>; RONCO. (1 February 1990) "Quarterly Report: Commodity Export Program Afghanistan: AID REP Project No. 306-0205-C-00-9384-00, October 1, 1989 through December 31, 1989." Available from USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse. Document PD-ABJ-491. rcr12-3; USAID 1989b, p. 8; Pertman, A. (18 February 1989) "Gorbachev Asks US to Halt Afghan Aid; $250m Nonmilitary Effort Detailed." *The Boston Globe*. p. 1; Hayter 2003.

[19] Crile 2004, p. 370. Use of mules to carry ammunition confirmed by: Local NGO Worker 2006.

[20] Crandall 2006.

[21] Crandall 2006.

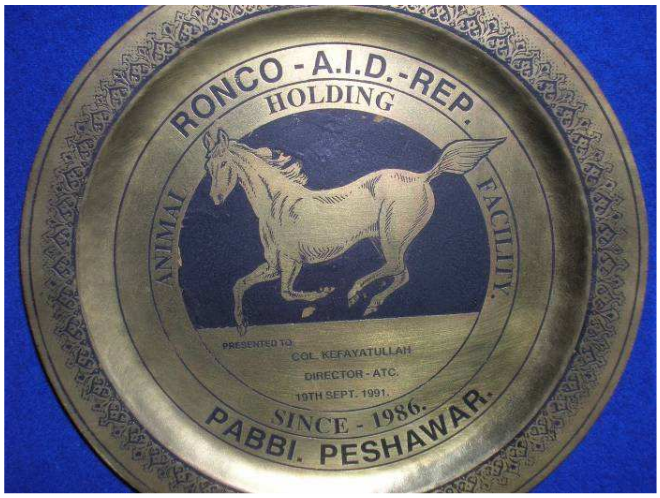
[22] USAID 1988, pp. 13-32.

[23] RONCO. (1994) "USAID/Afghanistan Commodity Export Program (CEP) Contract No. 306-0205-C-00-9384-00, March 1, 1989 through February 28, 1994: Final Report." Available from USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse. Document PD-ABI-329. ; RONCO. (June 1998) "Humanitarian Demining: Ten Years of Lessons." *The Journal of Humanitarian Demining*. Issue 2.2. <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/2.2/field/ronco.htm>; USAID. (16 November 1989) "Briefing Book for the Visit of ANE/Assistant Administrator Carol Adelman: December 1-8, 1989." *Digital National Security Archives: Afghanistan: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1973-1990*. <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com>. p. 4; USAID. (May 1994) "Project Assistance Completion Report: Commodity Export Program (306-0205)." Available from USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse. Document PD-ABJ-204. pp. 4-6.

[24] USAID 1989a, p. 8; USAID 1989b, p. 4; Buse, M. (June 2000) "RONCO Executives Talk About Demining, Integration and the IMAS Contract: (An Interview with Lawrence Crandall, Stephen Edelmann and A. David Lundberg)." *Journal of Mine Action*. Issue 4.2. <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/4.2/Features/ronco/ronco.htm>; Hayter 2003. Local NGO Worker 2006.

Royal Thai Army program using dogs to demine along the Cambodian border and suggested USAID use such dogs in Afghanistan.[25] Using dogs would be more appropriate than traditional bulky military demining machines that would have attracted enemy attention and been difficult to transport through the mountains.

**Figure 1: RONCO Animal Holding Facility Commemorative Plate. Kabul, Afghanistan, 2006.**




With the assistance of the CIA station in Bangkok, Crandall persuaded the Thai military to help train the mujahideen in demining.[26] In what Crandall later called "a covert operation,"[27] RONCO flew 14 German shepherd dogs and their Thai Army handlers to Pakistan. Though it was tough to overcome the "Thai-English-Pashto language barrier," RONCO trained 12 Afghan and two Pakistani handlers at its Animal Holding Facility and deployed them in early 1989. In a pilot effort, they cleared "approximately 137 kilometers of road leading into the town of Urgun, Patika province. Approximately 734 mines were removed or blown in place."[28] The mujahideen commander in that area, Haji Zarbad, escorted the team in and out of the country and provided them with food and accommodation; he now continues to work with the mine dog program.[29] USAID was impressed, calling the pilot a "huge success."[30]

Later that year, RONCO, with a Texan dog training company called Global Training Academy, set up the Afghanistan Mine Detection Dog Center (MDC) in Risalpur, Pakistan. This was the first time the US had contributed to the creation of a civilian mine action capacity. Trainee handlers would receive an eight week course at a facility provided by the Pakistani Army in Risalpur and then be deployed to Afghanistan for two out of three months, returning every third month for a refresher course. By April 1991,

[25] Crandall 2006; Hayter 2003; Buse 2000; RONCO 1998.
[26] Crandall 2006.
[27] In Buse 2000.
[28] USAID 1989c, Tab P; Safi, M. (31 October 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan.
[29] Local NGO Worker 2006. During this interview, the author also met Haji Zarbad.
[30] USAID 1989c.

RONCO reported that its teams had destroyed "in excess of 3,000 explosive devices" while clearing "736km of roads and two airstrips."[31]

The US continued to support the MDC directly through RONCO until 1994. There had been efforts to turn it over to UN control but the UNOCHA Afghanistan coordinator, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, an animal rights activist, had objected to the use of dogs in such a dangerous operation to clean up a human-caused problem.[32] However, in addition to providing dog teams to RONCO's local logistics partner agency,[33] the MDC surreptitiously coordinated its efforts with the UN operation until Aga Khan left.[34] The MDC was then reorganized as an NGO and incorporated into the fold of the UN program (described below). The MDC is now the biggest mine detection dog NGO in the world.[35]

**Figure 2: MDC Dog Trainer at Work. Kabul, Afghanistan, 2006.**

Because it was set up just as US interest in Afghanistan began to decline, MDC did not become as politicized as it possibly might have if the Cold War had continued. MDC fairly quickly became a relatively depoliticized part of the larger UN program. However, its roots lie in the logic of US covert action in Pakistan and Afghanistan. While ostensibly a humanitarian program, it also acted in support of a paramilitary campaign, and was run by a commercial company which was motivated at least somewhat by profit. There is no doubt that the early US funding for demining saved lives, but it also benefited the logistics capacity and political credibility of the mujahideen.

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[31] RONCO. (18 April 1991) "Proposal to Transfer Management of MDD Program from RONCO Consulting Corporation to Afghan Technical Consultants, UNOCA." Available from USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse. Document PD-ABJ-299. p. iii.

[32] Crandall 2006; Eaton, R. (2 August 2006) Personal interview with author in Takoma Park, Maryland, USA; McGrath, R. (2000) *Landmines and Unexploded Ordnance: A Resource Book*. London, Pluto Press. p. 150.

[33] Local NGO Worker 2006; UNOCHA. (1993) "Afghanistan: Mine Clearance Programme for 1993: Annual Report 1992." Document PC-AAA-511. USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse. p. 69.

[34] Local NGO Worker 2006.

[35] Hayter 2003; Buse 2000.

*2.1.2. The HALO Trust, 1987-1994*

The many international NGOs involved in providing aid to the Afghans in the 1980s were also fully aware of the threat mines and UXO posed both to their own workers and the people they served, and began seeking ways to mitigate it. The International Committee of the Red Cross, which was running hospitals for war wounded, provided medical care and developed prosthetics for mine accident survivors.[36] Handicap International also worked with mine survivors both in Afghanistan and in the refugee camps in Pakistan.[37] Several international NGOs also began incorporating mine awareness education into other programs like health and education. In early 1988, despite accusations of imprudence from other NGOs, Rae McGrath, then country director of World Vision International and former British serviceman, organized one of the first NGO-implemented mine clearance programs in the context of rural rehabilitation project in Chamkani, Paktia province.[38] He then set up Mines Advisory Group (MAG), a British NGO, with the purpose of assisting the UN in developing a mine clearance program in Afghanistan (see next section).

However, only one international NGO, the Hazardous Area Life-support Organisation (HALO) Trust actually developed a sustained, long-term mine clearance program in Afghanistan. Now one of the largest demining organizations in the world, indeed one of the biggest charities based in Britain, the HALO Trust is a little out of place among traditional 'civil society' groups, as it was begun by ex-British Army officers Colin Mitchell and Guy Willoughby. Both of them had worked in Afghanistan and were shocked at the humanitarian impact of mines. They felt that rather than leaving it to the military, demining ought to be "an act of charity."[39] It has maintained a reputation of prickly independence and paramilitary discipline that is reflected in the personalities and careers of its founders.

**Figure 3: HALO Trust Compound. Kabul, Afghanistan, 2006.**


[36] Kelliher, A. (9 March 1989) "Anti-personnel mines maim Afghans." *United Press International*.
[37] Aid Watch. (10 June 2003) "Handicap International." <http://www.observatoire-humanitaire.org/fusion.php?l=GB&id=21>.
[38] McGrath 2000, pp. 116, 238; Aqa, S. (August 2005) "Mine Action: Success and Challenges." *Journal of Mine Action: A Retrospective on Mine Action*. 9.1. <http://maic.jmu.edu/JOURNAL/9.1/Focus/aqa/aqa.htm>.
[39] Willoughby, G. (21 September 2007) Personal interview with author in Thornhill, Scotland.

In 1987, Mitchell and Willoughby decided to set up the HALO Trust to help mitigate the humanitarian impact of the Afghan war. As former soldiers, they were interested in the ways they could put their military knowledge to use for civilian and humanitarian benefit. Demining seemed an obvious choice.[40] However, since the idea of an NGO getting involved in a 'military issue' was so radical – press articles from the time called it a "bizarre"[41] and "quixotic mission"[42] – they decided to start with small and tangential projects. Following an assessment in June and July 1988, they recruited a Kabuli doctor, Farid Homayoun, and set up an office in Shar-e-Naw, in the town center of communist-controlled Kabul.[43] Throughout 1988 and 1989, HALO provided mine awareness briefings to the expatriate community in Kabul and ran maternal and child health clinics in the city, in partnership with UNICEF and the Afghan Red Crescent. With ex-British Army volunteers, many of whom learned mine-clearing in the Falklands War, HALO began its nascent demining program by responding to explosive ordnance disposal needs at the German and Japanese embassies and Hoechst Pharmaceutical Co. in 1989.[44]

Their major breakthrough came when they were able to obtain Soviet minefield records given to the Afghan government when Soviet troops withdrew in early 1989.[45] While these were later found to be rather inaccurate, persuading the Kabul government to allow a Western NGO to photograph secret Soviet military documents signaled the beginning of a significant shift in thinking about the mine problem as a humanitarian rather than military issue. By the end of 1989, the *New York Times* was describing Guy Willoughby and another Englishman, Paul Jefferson, working their way through minefields in Pul-e-Khumri in a pilot project intended "to test the accuracy of Soviet mine maps and to show the Afghan Army's engineering corps how the job is done."[46] HALO then began planning to scale up their operation, approaching the nascent UN demining program for funding.

In the politically charged context following the Soviet withdrawal, HALO's program aroused suspicions and contradictory rumors made the rounds. Some agencies cast a disapproving eye on the fact that HALO was the only demining group, and one of very few western NGOs, that coordinated its efforts with the communist government. This was seen by some as 'aiding the enemy.' "Our job is to get things going and to save lives, rather than dithering about the politics of giving aid to the regime of President Najibullah," said Willoughby. "There may be 20,000 Communists, but there are over one million displaced people in Kabul alone who need our help."[47] However, despite any concerns the UN might have had about HALO, it was the only demining agency working the communist-controlled part of Afghanistan. The US-supported MDC and the UN-

[40] Homayoun, F. (19 November 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan.
[41] Walker, C. (24 February 1989) "'Mad Mitch' Will Help to Clear Afghan Mines." *The Times*.
[42] Kelliher 1989.
[43] Homayoun 2006.
[44] HALO Trust. (2 November 2006) "The HALO Trust Afghanistan." PowerPoint Presentation given to author by Dr. Farid Homayoun. Slide 7. ; Homayoun 2006.
[45] Burns, J.F. (2 December 1989) "British Group Clears Mines Of Kabul War." *The New York Times*. p. 23; Urban, M. (1 October 1988) "Afghan Refugees Return to a Ruined Land." *The Independent*. p. 8; Walker 1989a.
[46] Burns 1989.
[47] Walker 1989a.

created NGOs only worked in the mujahideen-controlled regions. Therefore, the UN made its first contract with HALO in 1990 and HALO has continued to be a UN implementing partner ever since. It has since grown into the biggest demining agency in Afghanistan, with some 2,800 staff.

*2.1.3. Operation Salaam and the UNOCHA Mine Clearance Programme, 1988-1994*

In 1988, the US and USSR signed the Geneva Accords, aimed at ending hostilities in Afghanistan and preparing the way for a Soviet withdrawal, which occurred in 1989. Anticipating a large scale return of refugees to Afghanistan, the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) launched a massive program of assistance, dubbed Operation Salam, under the supervision of a former UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan.[48]

The early haphazard and misguided UN efforts to deal with the mine problem show just how new and unprecedented the idea of a humanitarian mine clearance program was. Following an initial assessment and development of a curriculum by a survey team of military personnel from France, Turkey, the UK and USA, a Mine Clearance Programme was established within Operation Salaam.[49] By the end of 1989, military personnel from Australia, Canada, France, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Turkey, the USA and UK had trained 13,827 Afghan refugee volunteers to "return to their homes and begin to clear their areas of mines."[50] However, this effort failed, marked by "a good deal of confusion … lack of communication … [and] lack of planning at all levels."[51] Firstly, because "The envisaged large scale repatriation of Afghan refugees…did not occur."[52] Secondly, and more importantly, the lack of any supervisory or regulatory framework seems to have led to shoddy work and bad accidents.[53]

After a "radical rethink,"[54] UNOCHA decided to develop a formal and specialized institutional structure to coordinate and implement demining in Afghanistan. UNOCHA would fund, coordinate and supervise the program, and provide expatriate technical advisors to several local Afghan-run NGO implementing partners,[55] through an office called the UN Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (UNMACA) based in Pakistan. Martin Barber, a senior officer in Operation Salam at the time and later head of the UN

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[48] UNOCA. (December 1998) *Operation Salam News*. 1.

[49] UNOCA. (1992) "UNOCA Demining Programme." Document PC-AAA-509. USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse. p. 1.

[50] UNOCA 1992, p. 2, 7.

[51] Demining Headquarters Peshawar and Quetta. (1990) "1990 Annual Reports: Demining Headquarters Peshawar and Quetta." Document PC-AAA-512. USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse. p. 17.

[52] UNOCA 1992, p. 2.

[53] Eaton, R., Horwood, C. & Niland, N. (1997) *Afghanistan: The Development of Indigenous Mine Action Capacities*. New York, UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs Lessons Learned Unit. p. 12-13. See also: Coll, S. (20 March 1990) "U.N. Aide Assails Afghan Relief Project; Shortcomings Cited in Efforts to Clear Land Mines Said to Harm Thousands of Refugees." *The Washington Post.* p. A15.

[54] Barber, M. (28 November 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan.

[55] Several commentators (e.g. GICHD 2004, p. 76) have questioned whether the Afghan demining NGOs are actually NGOs, claiming they are more like contractors to the UN. The author, however, would argue this is a rather semantic debate. The academic literature on NGOs has shown that NGOs all over the globe are not chastely separated from government and capital. The lines between 'civil society' and other sectors are often blurred. Therefore, the author would argue that Afghan demining NGOs are no more 'compromised' than many other international or local NGOs in Afghanistan or elsewhere.

Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in New York, explained that this decision was made because the UN wanted to keep the program out of the sphere of political contestation until a government recognized by the majority of the international community and Afghan people sat in Kabul:

> The UN system as a whole had really adopted the NGOs as an alternative to working with local government…. We didn't want to carve it out for international commercial companies to make a lot of money out of, even if those companies had been willing to work in the context of Afghanistan as it then was, which, frankly I don't think they would have.[56]

**Figure 4: OMAR deminers on 'TV Hill.' Kabul, Afghanistan, 2006.**

The responsibilities of these NGOs, founded between 1990 and 1993 and funded through UNOCHA grants, were divided by technical specialty and region. The Mine Clearance and Planning Agency (MCPA) surveyed and mapped the mine problem, and made estimates of the labor and time needed to clear specific areas. Manual and mechanical clearance programs were set up by Afghan Technical Consultants (ATC) in east and central Afghanistan, and the South West Afghan Agency for Demining (SWAAD) in the southwest. After "internal management problems," SWAAD was reformed and renamed the Demining Agency for Afghanistan (DAFA) in 1993.[57] The Organization for Mine Awareness (OMA) worked to educate both refugees and people still living in Afghanistan about the mine and UXO problem. In August 1992, OMA took on mine clearance tasks to cover western Afghanistan, overlooked up until that point, and changed its name to the Organization for Mine Clearance and Afghan Rehabilitation (OMAR) in 1993. Northern Afghanistan was left to the HALO Trust. These NGOs, and UNOCHA, their supervisor and funder, were known collectively as the UN Mine Action Program for Afghanistan (MAPA).

[56] Barber 2006.
[57] UNOCHA Mine Clearance Programme. (30 June 1993) "Mid Year Report." Document PC-AAA-510. USAID Development Experience Clearinghouse.

Unlike the US program, the UN claimed "Neutrality" as a key aspect of the program.[58] In the beginning this was not entirely true. The early expatriate military officers seconded to the program were from non-Communist states and were interested in learning about Soviet mine warfare.[59] The UN training camps were set up and run by the Pakistani Army, the ISI bussed prospective deminers, recruited from the Pakistan-based, Pashtun-dominated mujahideen parties, to the training camps,[60] and they were only sent to work in mujahideen-controlled areas of Afghanistan. Moreover, some of the Afghan NGOs, for a time, were associated with political factions.[61]

However, as the "The uncertain security situation" became one of the "major constraints in the efficient implementation of the mine clearance programme" [62] and the communist government fell in 1992, the MAPA managed, perhaps out of necessity, to establish a non-partisan reputation among the mujahideen parties that began to fight for the remains of the Afghan state. Especial effort, largely successful, was made to disassociate the NGOs from political parties. By the end of 1994, the MAPA had cleared over 32,000 mines and 24,000 UXO from over 75 million square meters of land.[63]

## 2.2. UN Hegemony, 1994-2001

While in the early years there were several alternative models of responding to the Afghan mine problem, it was the UN-led, NGO implemented model that eventually became ascendant in Afghanistan. Indeed, Mohammed Sediq, now UNMACA chief of operations points to the "very strong" coordination mechanisms" as a root of the MAPA's success.[64] This section outlines how the UN demining program achieved its hegemonic position between 1994 and 2001.

After the Communist government in Kabul fell in 1992, and the threat of the USSR disappeared with the end of the Cold War, the US lost interest in Afghanistan as a strategic priority. Therefore, the CBHA wound down rapidly and by 1994 had pulled out of Pakistan and Afghanistan completely. By that time, Prince Agha Khan had left the UN program and so there was no objection on either the US or UN side to reorganize the MDC as a local NGO and incorporate it into the MAPA. The US continued to fund Afghan demining at a level of about $1-3 million a year from 1994 to 2001, but channeled and coordinated all its assistance through the MAPA.[65] Unlike the partisan spirit of the CBHA, the MDC, like the other Afghan NGOs, "established a working relationship with all sides"[66] in the ongoing conflict between the mujahideen parties.

The HALO Trust, since it was largely funded through the UN system, also became subsumed under the MAPA umbrella, though it was "highly resistant to coordination by

[58] UNOCHA 1993b, p. 6.
[59] Barber 2006.
[60] Maslen 2004, p. 38.
[61] Eaton, et al. 1997, p. 14, footnote 13.
[62] UNOCA 1992, p. 8-9.
[63] UNMACA IMSMA Database. (November 2006) Data queries on clearance area and devices. A spreadsheet of UNMAPA annual funding levels given to author by UNMACA in late 2006.
[64] Sediq, M. (23 November 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan.
[65] UNMACA (2006) "Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan (MAPA) funding 1994 / 2004 - Voluntary Trust Fund and Bilateral funds." Excel spreadsheet given to author.
[66] Local NGO Worker 2006.

UNOCHA." [67] For many years HALO maintained its own separate survey capacity, rather than relying on the local NGO MCPA, like the rest of MAPA. It also refused to coordinate its operations to include MDC's dogs, because HALO did not trust the ability of dogs discover mines effectively. However, an uneasy truce developed, analogous to a 'federal' system, where HALO was under the MAPA umbrella, but had a degree of autonomy that the other, local mine action NGOs did not have. Thus from 1994 to 2001, the system remained largely unchanged and unchallenged.

While the rise of the Taliban in 1997 posed some difficulties – for instance, the Taliban objected to the employment of women as mine awareness instructors and harshly persecuted some non-Pastun deminers – in the end, most mine action agencies had tolerable relations with them. Security for deminers improved considerably as the Taliban cracked down on warlordism and violent crime. The Taliban, like many Afghans, viewed demining as a continuation of the jihad against the Soviets and were largely supportive, even donating land to some of the NGOs. The Taliban also used few mines, and in 1998 publicly backed a ban on them. The Northern Alliance, which were fighting a defensive war against the Taliban, did continue to use mines extensively, but they too were largely supportive of the demining program in areas of low strategic importance. [68] The MAPA's perceived neutrality was critical in maintaining its ability to work extensively all over the country. Expressing a sentiment that most Afghan mine action personnel hold, Dr. Farid of HALO Trust said, "The important thing is to keep neutrality, so you are not seen as pro this or against that group. That's the key thing, having a neutral, impartial humanitarian organization."[69] However, as the Taliban and their Al Qaeda sponsors faced international rebuke following the bombings of US embassies in East Africa in 1998, and subsequent US missile strikes on Afghanistan, the program stagnated somewhat, struggling to finding funding.

The streamlining, increased coordination and economies of scale that came from running the program under one umbrella seemed have some payoff, with a trebling of minefield area cleared between 1991 and 1999 (tailing off in the funding crisis of 1998-2001) and a quadrupling of battle area[70] cleared between 1994 and 2001. While there was an upturn following the 1998 funding crisis, cost of clearance also showed a slow but discernable decline toward 50 cents per square meter of minefield cleared.

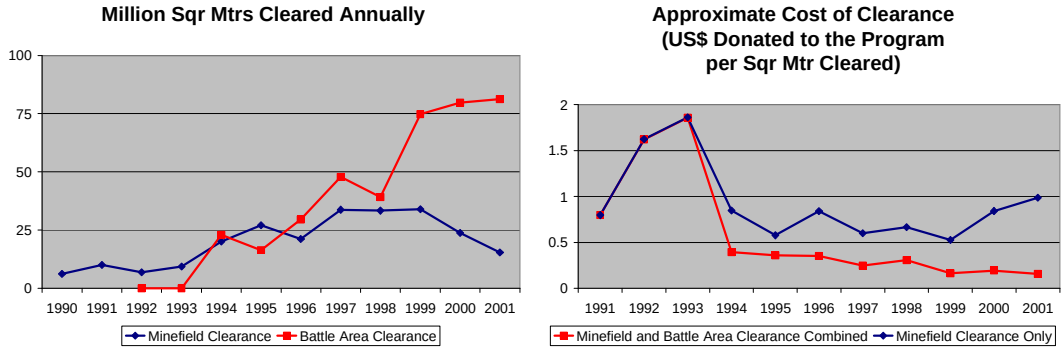
[67] Eaton, et al. 1997, p. 15.

[68] For an analysis of Taliban and North Alliance attitudes on landmines see: Geneva Call. (2005) *Armed Non-State Actors and Landmines*. Geneva, Program for the Study of International Organization(s). pp. 65-67. See also: Chawla, S. (June 2000) "Diffusion of Landmines in Afghanistan." *Strategic Analysis: A Monthly Journal of the IDSA.* 24(3). <http://www.ciaonet.org/olj/sa/sa_jun00chs01.html#note8>.

[69] Homayoun 2006.

[70] Battle area clearance is conducted in areas where there is contamination from UXO, but there is not thought to be a significant mine problem. It is much cheaper than minefield clearance as it does not require as rigorous safety precautions.

**Figure 5: Trends in the UN Mine Action Program for Afghanistan, 1990-2001**[71]




However, the UN-led system was not without its problems and critics.

First, many felt the system was far too rigid and that the UN controlled it too tightly. As mentioned above, the HALO Trust argued for and jealously guarded a degree of autonomy from the UN that the other agencies did not have. Moreover, for several years the UN program implicitly discouraged the local NGOs from seeking external sources of funding.[72] This was to ensure coordination and a streamlined system, but did little to develop the independent financial capacity of the local NGOs.

Second, many have criticized the lack of competition in the system, or any strong incentives for NGOs to increase productivity. While there were several NGOs, they did not compete against each other for funding as tasks were divided largely on the basis of geography or technical service provided. As the academic literature on the political-economy of rent-seeking has suggested,[73] a lack of competition in provision of public services can lead to waste, misallocation and even abuse of resources. Thus concerns of petty corruption or waste of resources have occasionally been raised by people concerned that the MAPA played into a rent-seeking polity. Thus Harpviken noted in 2002 that the Afghan NGOs were "relatively weak in terms of accountability and corporate governance."[74]

Third, though recognizing that handing the demining program to the Taliban would have killed chances for international funding, some mine action experts felt uncomfortable that the program had remained in external, international, control for so long. The headquarters of the UN program remained in Peshawar, Pakistan, and the top level management were all expatriates. Several commentators hoped that when a stable

[71] UNMACA. (November 2006) IMSMA Database. Data queries on clearance area 1990-2001. The methodology of using amount donated to the program divided by square meter (or mine or UXO) as a rough approximation of cost was borrowed from GICHD 2004, p. 101. Donation data from UNMACA 2006b.

[72] McCarthy, R. (16 April 2007) Personal interview with author in New York.

[73] eg. Krueger, A.O. (June 1974) "The Political Economy of the Rent-Seeking Society." *American Economic Review*. 64(3) p. 291-303; Vickers, J. & Yarrow, G. (Spring 1991) "Economic Perspectives on Privatization." *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*. 5(2). p. 113; World Bank. (1997) *World Development Report 1997: The State in a Changing World*. New York, Oxford University Press. p. 105-106.

[74] Harpviken, K.B. (2002) "Breaking new ground: Afghanistan's response to landmines and unexploded ordnance." *Third World Quarterly*. 23(5). p. 935.

and internationally recognized government finally came to Kabul, the MAPA would be transferred to local control.

Fourth, due to the international isolation of the Taliban regime, the UN found it difficult to grow the program. Afghanistan had fallen off the strategic maps of the great powers and donors were reluctant to engage too deeply with an Islamist regime with close links to international terrorism. The political climate in the aftermath of US missile strikes in 1998 made it especially difficult to secure funding (looking at the above graphs one can see evidence of stagnation or recession in the years between 1998 and 2001).

Finally, some commentators felt the success of the demining program distracted from the international community's failure to stop the root cause of the mine and UXO problem – the conflict itself. They said demining was a way for the international community to 'manage' the effects, rather than a solution to the civil conflict and frame it as humanitarian rather than a political issue.[75]

**Figure 6:UNMACA Headquarters in Kabul. Kabul, Afghanistan, 2006.**

Despite these issues, the UN–led demining program achieved a great deal in an extremely difficult political context. By the end of 2001, the MAPA had cleared over 93,000 mines and nearly 820,000 UXO from over 632 million square meters of contaminated area.[76] Moreover, clearance yielded significant economic benefits – a UNDP and World Bank study found a $91.5 million net benefit, a 47% return, from demining in 1999 alone.[77] An earlier study with similar findings showed that almost 86% of demined land was being used productively.[78] Thus Harpviken argued in 2002 that despite "a state of civil war … no functioning government, and … the mixed results gained in other sectors of assistance," the Afghan demining program was, "a world leader

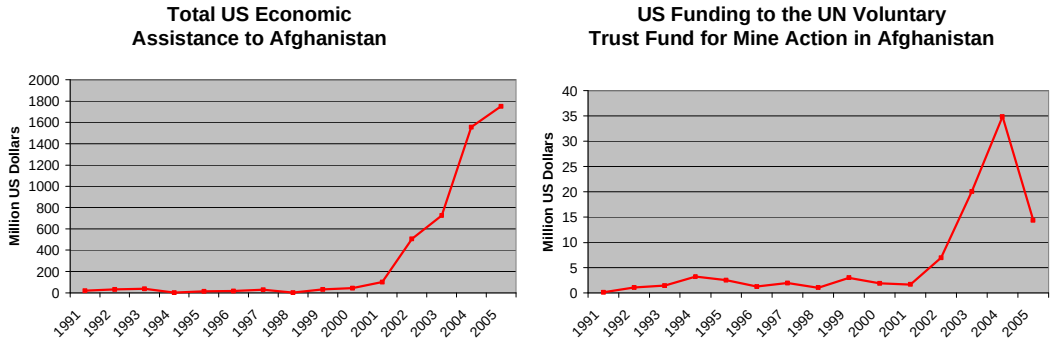
[75] e.g. Michael Ignatieff in: Monin & Gallimore 2002.
[76] UNMACA IMSMA Database. (November 2006) Data queries on clearance area and devices.
[77] Quoted in GICHD 2004, p. 104.
[78] MCPA. (December 1999) *Socio-Economic Impact Study of Landmines and Mine Action Operations in Afghanistan.* Islamabad, Pakistan, UNMAPA. p. 2.

in its field" and "one of the best functioning sectors in economic and humanitarian assistance to the country."[79]

## 2.3. The 9/11 Sea Change

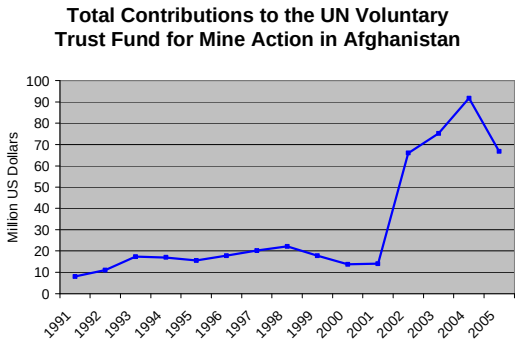
After seven years of disengagement from the country, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 put Afghanistan back on the US geo-political map. Unlike in the 1980s, when the US mainly operated through Pakistani interlocutors from the safety of Islamabad, US agencies involved themselves directly in Afghan politics. While they were relatively hands off in comparison to their participation in international regimes in Bosnia, Kosovo or Iraq, US involvement was unprecedented as far as Afghanistan was concerned. The graphs below shows how US assistance in general, and demining assistance in particular, ramped up suddenly after 2002.

**Figure 7: US Aid to Afghanistan, General and Mine Action, 1991-2005.[80]**




Other developed countries followed America's lead, increasing their foreign aid contributions to Afghanistan substantially. As one might expect, this led to the explosive growth of the MAPA. The following graph shows how quickly the program grew post-9/11.

**Figure 8: Contributions to UN Mine Action, 1991-2005.[81]**




[79] Harpviken 2002, p. 931.
[80] USAID. (2006) "U.S. Overseas Loans and Grants [Greenbook]." <http://qesdb.usaid.gov/gbk/>. Donation data from UNMACA 2006b.
[81] Donation data from UNMACA 2006b.

At the same time, funding modalities for demining multiplied. Before 2001, the majority of funding (with a few bilateral exceptions) was channeled through the UN trust fund. After 2002, there was an increase in bilateral involvement, UNDP funded demining training for demobilized soldiers through NGOs, and UNOPS channeled money from the World Bank and USAID. The staggering increase and diversification of funds led to demands for greater scrutiny over how funds were used and a shake up in the management of the demining program. Donors and the UN were concerned that the Afghan NGOs did not have necessary the management and financial accounting capacity. Chris Stephens, program manager responsible for Afghanistan at the UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) in New York, said:

> The capacity of the NGOs had rapidly expanded in the operational sense, for instance, one of the NGOs went from 2000 people to 4000 people operationally, and the one thing that had not been effectively looked at during that process had been their back-office structures.[82]

Therefore, the UN commissioned Price Waterhouse Coopers to conduct a major audit of the program in 2004, in order to identify weaknesses in the system and where to direct capacity building efforts. As a result, the last five years have seen considerable reform of UNMACA and the Afghan NGOs. In order to improve UNMACA's understanding of the local situation and take the first step to great local control, UNMACA moved its headquarters from Peshawar in Pakistan to Kabul. UNMACA increased the staffing of its program section to monitor the use of funds, tightened up NGO reporting requirements and embedded expatriate financial capacity building advisors within each of the Afghan NGOs. The UN also cut off funds to a couple underperforming local NGOs, and eventually, following an attempt to reorganize it, incorporated the local NGO Monitoring Evaluation and Training Agency (META) into UNMACA itself. Between 2003 and 2004, MCPA in cooperation with the Survey Action Center, an American NGO, conducted a Landmine Impact Survey – a comprehensive study which ranked Afghan communities according to the human and socio-economic impact of landmines. This is now used by UNMACA to better target and prioritize demining according to human need.[83] Finally, in late 2006, a new UNMACA Chief of Staff, Kerei Ruru was brought in with an apparent mandate to overhaul and revitalize the organization. Chris Stephens of UNMAS noted in early 2007 some of the significant achievements of the MAPA's recent reform:

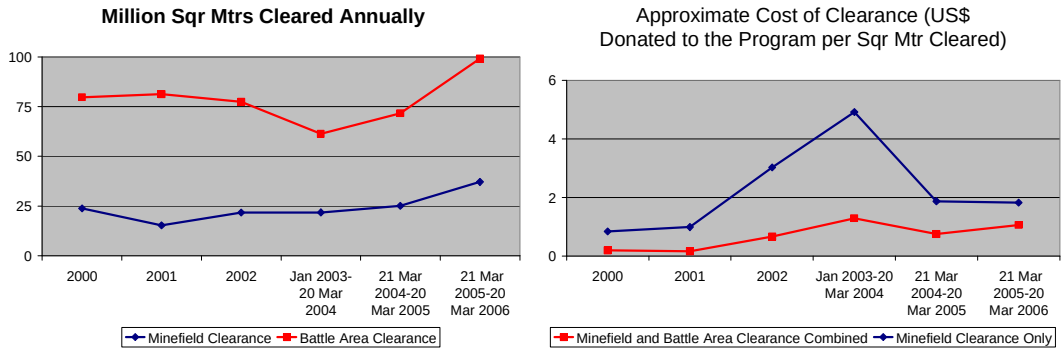
> Fundamental changes have taken place. The change in the drills, one man-one lane, the increase in mechanical capacity, the shift of everyone to demining teams, the re-roling of the NGOs – they now all have their own organic survey capacity, MCPA is a clearance organization, MDC is providing subcontracted dogs across all the organizations so they have complete toolboxes, the NGOs have been restructured to not be across seven areas, but be across three, the internal levels of their organization have been reduced so that their headquarters elements have been reduced right down to ensure we have more funding going to meet demining teams.[84]

Data suggests that the influx of resources and the reform efforts may have had impact on the productivity of the UN-led program. The area cleared annually increased steadily from 2003 onwards. Cost of clearance has risen however, perhaps partly as a result of the '9/11 rent' seen across most sectors of the Afghan economy. The strategic value of

[82] Stephens, C. (16 April 2007) Personal interview with author in New York.
[83] Survey Action Center 2006.
[84] Stephens 2007.

Afghanistan has risen, bringing with it the cost of land, labor and commodities. It is possible that this has had some inflationary pressure on the cost of clearance, which has doubled since 2001.

**Figure 9: Recent Trends in the UN Mine Action Program for Afghanistan, 2000-March 2006**[85]




Despite its efforts, US government agencies have not been fully satisfied with UNMACA's reform. While welcoming the appointment of Kerei Ruru, USAID's demining coordinator, Dean Hutson, said he saw UNMACA as "broken…a failed organization."[86] He said USAID's main complaint was that UNMACA was not providing them with adequate reports and so he did not trust the quality control and quality assurance capacity of UNMACA.[87] Initially, USAID channeled its funding for reconstruction demining through the UN system and RONCO was contracted by the State Department to build the capacity of the Afghan NGOs. However, a parallel structure also began to emerge, with RONCO contracted by the military to demine bases and by the State Department to dispose of excess and captured munitions.[88] RONCO's return to Afghanistan presaged the growing commercialization of demining from 2005 onwards, outlined in section 3.

## 2.4. Summary

In sum, the origins of Afghan demining offered three alternative models of organizing demining:

1) Demining in support of broader US security objectives, contracted through a private company (the RONCO/MDC program),
2) International NGO mine action claiming political neutrality (the HALO Trust),
3) UN coordinated mine action, implemented by local NGOs and also claiming political neutrality (the UN Mine Action Program for Afghanistan).

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[85] UNMACA. (November 2006) IMSMA Database. Data queries on clearance area 2000-2002. Data from 2003 onwards from: UNMACA. (2006) *Mine Action Programme for Afghanistan: 1384 (2005-2006) Progress Report.* Kabul, Afghanistan, UNMACA. Donation data from UNMACA 2006b.
[86] Hutson, D. (30 November 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan.
[87] Hutson 2006.
[88] Lundberg, J. (August 2005) "Reflecting on 10 Years of RONCO Operations in Mine Action." *Journal of Mine Action.* Issue 9.1; RONCO. (April 2003) "Mine Detection Dogs: An Integral Tool in RONCO Mine Clearance Operations" *Journal of Mine Action.* Issue 7.1. <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/7.1/features/ronco/ronco.htm>.

From 1994 till 2001, the third model was ascendant and the UN's position as the leader of Afghan mine action remained relatively unchallenged. However, as will be described in the following sections, US re-engagement in Afghan politics after 9/11 has seen the reappearance of the first model – a significant challenge to the established institutional structure of mine action.

## *3. The Commercialization Process*

### 3.1. RONCO Returns

After an eight year absence, RONCO returned to Afghanistan in 2002, asked by the US State Department to assist military engineers in demining Bagram and Kandahar air bases. Moreover, said a RONCO publicist, "Based on its closely integrated operations with the U.S. Army, RONCO was also tasked with developing and training the first MDD [Mine Detection Dog] teams deployed in the U.S. Army since Vietnam."[89] It made sense for the US to bring in commercial capacity for such tasks, to avoid distracting humanitarian deminers from their priorities by tasking them with military demining.

**Figure 10: RONCO Deminers at Kabul International Airport. Kabul, Afghanistan, 2006.**

RONCO also worked outside the military bases, but this too fit within the broader strategic objectives of the US government. For instance, since "securing stores of ammunition has been a high priority for Afghan and U.S. forces" in order to deny ordnance to the insurgency, RONCO developed Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) teams for "clearing up strike areas and ammunition dumps for the U.S. State Department and the Afghan government."[90] RONCO cites the following anecdote as one of its success stories:

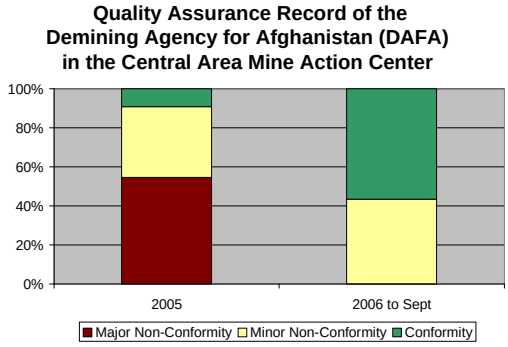
[89] Lundberg 2005.

[90] After August 2005, this State Department project was implemented by DynCorp and sub-contracted to UXB International and included "destruction support services for integrated humanitarian mine action (HMA), small arms/light weapons (SA/LW), man-portable air defense systems (MANPADS), and other explosive remnants of war (ERW)." Anon. (8 September 2005) "DynCorp International to Remove Land Mines In Afghanistan." *Business Wire*.

> When the coalition airfield at Kandahar came under numerous rocket attacks in early 2004, regional authorities requested RONCO deploy its teams to clear up munitions sites in the area surrounding the base. Clearance operations lasted five months, and since their completion, there have been no significant rocket attacks.[91]

However, until 2005, commercial demining was limited to RONCO's assistance to the military and a State Department contract to build the capacity of the existing UN-led system. RONCO "chose not to implement sweeping changes and instead worked to improve pre-existing Afghan demining elements, coordinating their work and bringing them up to the level of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS)."[92] Much of their effort was aimed at improving the work of DAFA, which has gone from having a poor quality record to one of the best, as displayed by the following graph showing the results of quality assurance inspections on their sites:

**Figure 11: The Impact of RONCO's Capacity Building on the Quality of DAFA's Demining in the Central Area[93]**




## 3.2. The Commercial Influx

RONCO lost its position as the sole commercial demining company in Afghanistan in 2004, when the UNMACA decided to allow accreditation of commercial companies interested in military and commercial reconstruction tasks. It is possible that the inflation of the cost of demining (the possible '9/11 rent' shown in figure 9 above) made commercial companies sit up and notice the potential for profit in Afghanistan. Allowing commercial operators to do demining tasks for the military made a great deal of sense, as using Afghan NGOs would distract them from their humanitarian priorities.[94] However, the decision to allow them to do civilian reconstruction tasks met with more controversy. The rationale usually given by UNMACA and donors was that the new Afghan NGO Law forbade NGOs from bidding directly on commercial reconstruction tasks.[95]

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<http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0EIN/is_2005_Sept_8/ai_n15375022>; Gannon, R. (20 November 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan; Lundberg 2005.

[91] Lundberg 2005.

[92] Lundberg 2005.

[93] Quality assurance report data provided to the author by the Kabul Area Mine Action Center (AMAC).

[94] Powell, S. (1 November 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan.

[95] Article 8 prohibits NGOs from "Participation in construction projects and contracts" except in "exceptional cases" when the Minister of Economy "may issue special permission at the request of the Chief of the Diplomatic Agency of the donor country." Government of Afghanistan. (June 2005) "Law on Non-Governmental Organizations." *Official Gazette*. 857/2005.

However, some have argued that this problem could be circumvented by donors channeling money for demining as separate grants coordinated with reconstruction work (rather than commercial tenders) through the UN system. Perhaps a more likely reason is that there was dissatisfaction among some donors about the dysfunctions in the MAPA and the lack of competitive and transparent bidding processes. Developing a commercial sector was one way to encourage reform.

**Figure 12: S3AG Armored Bulldozers. Kabul, Afghanistan, 2006.**

Since 2005, six international commercial demining companies have flooded into Afghanistan. Further commercialization looks likely, as USAID decided in July 2006 that it would no longer channel its money through the UN to the local NGOs, but would simplify the process by having the prime contractor (such as Louis Berger Group) subcontract needed tasks to commercial demining companies. While the US State Department continues to fund and provide technical assistance to the Afghan NGOs through its capacity building grant (which RONCO lost to the private security firm DynCorp in 2005), part of this program's emphasis has shifted to assisting the local Afghan NGOs to spin off commercial operations.[96] A major argument in favor of this is the diversification of funding for local demining, which up until recently has relied on the UN – a pot of money that some say threatens to dwindle in coming years. Therefore, Dean Hutson of USAID argues that it is important that local demining organizations learn to compete for funding.

> It has forced them now to be business entities, which is probably the end state that we want to see anyway. We don't want this to be a non-stop, continuing welfare operation where we just hand out money to do it.[97]

Therefore, one could argue that commercialization will create a more sustainable system, allowing local demining groups to learn to stand on their own feet, and begin,

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<http://www.usig.org/countryinfo/laws/Afghanistan/Afghan%20NGO%20Law%20Final%20ENG%20(10.July.05).pdf>.

[96] Carpenter, L. (21 November 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan.

[97] Hutson 2006.

through experience and partnerships with international companies, to compete in the international market. Expressing a view that fits with USAID's overall strategy of encouraging private sector-led economic development in Afghanistan,[98] USAID demining coordinator Dean Hutson said:

> We don't want to babysit this country for the next twenty years, we want this country to stand up on its own, with its own business, its own private enterprise. … [We want to say] here's the money, compete for this, do business for this, work for this, think for it, you know, not just kind of hanging off the government dole out there, waiting for it, but to actually put together your own businesses and make something of the country.[99]

At the time of the author's fieldwork in late 2006, ATC director Kefayatullah Eblagh had set up the company Hemayatbrothers International Demining (HID) and had been subcontracted by the company UXB International to provide labor. OMAR director Fazel Karim Fazel was considering reviving a long dormant commercial operation OMAR International, registered in Dubai. At the same time, all the Afghan NGO directors were setting up a commercial Afghan Demining Group (ADG), employing unemployed deminers and under the leadership of an independent director. At the time of writing, it was expected that as ADG becomes operational, HID will fold into it or along with OMAR International bid only on contracts outside Afghanistan. While the initial agreement is that profits will be reinvested into ADG, it is still unclear how profits will be distributed once it is no longer necessary for ADG to expand.

In what has the potential to be a major boost to local commercial companies, the US State Department has agreed to allow equipment that it has donated to local NGOs for use by local commercial companies, if the NGOs have a surplus of equipment.[100] At the time of the author's fieldwork, other donors were still considering whether to allow this. However, UNMACA Chief of Staff said, "it doesn't look likely" that there will be a surplus of equipment, so the decision may have little impact anyway.[101]

## 3.3. Market Profile

Because of the bewildering array of clients, publicity restrictions on defense contracts, and the tight-lipped posture of some of the companies, it is very difficult to estimate the size of the commercial market. Based on commercial companies' self-reporting of revenue and/or output, the author estimates total revenue from commercial demining in 2006 was around $15 to 20 million. The increase in the value of demining, possibly due to the '9/11 rent' mentioned previously, has made commercial demining viable. However, it is not quite a 'goldmine'; profit margins were fairly slim, with Bob Gannon of RONCO saying, "if you can make 10% you are doing well."[102]

At the time of writing, there were seven international commercial companies involved in mine action and three local start-ups. RONCO is, at the moment, the largest company. A list and description of the other commercial companies involved in Afghanistan is in

[98] USAID. (May 2005) "USAID/Afghanistan Strategic Plan: 2005-2010." <http://www.usaid.gov/locations/asia_near_east/afghanistan/Afghanistan_2005-2010_Strategy.pdf>. p. 7.
[99] Hutson 2006.
[100] Cranfield University. (December 2006) "Minutes of the Strategic Organizational development Workshop." p. 7-8.
[101] Ruru, K. (7 December 2006) Comment at presentation of preliminary research findings by author to the UN Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (UNMACA); Cranfield University 2006, p. 7.
[102] Gannon 2006.

the Annex to this report. Excluding at least 250 Bosnian, Mozambican and Zimbabwean deminers employed at Bagram airbase (the number of which has been difficult to ascertain), the author estimates that the commercial sector employed at least 50 expatriates (mostly British, American, Australian, South African and Zimbabwean) and 1,000 Afghans in 2006.[103]

In September 2006, USAID awarded a five year $1.4 billion energy, water and transportation infrastructure contract to Louis Berger Group, Inc. and Black & Veatch Special Projects Corp[104] and in February 2007, posted a Notice of Intent to issue a Request for Applications for a further $400 million to construct "Strategic Provincial Roads" in South and East Afghanistan – those areas most affected by insurgencies.[105] It is understood that a sizable portion of both these contracts will be sub-contracted for demining and battle area clearance. This was followed in late March with the announcement that RONCO had won a $16.4 million three year contract to provide demining services to the US Army.[106] Therefore, the commercial demining market is set to expand considerably over the next few years.

Interestingly, despite the US change in favor of commercialization, it does not seem that many other donor countries will follow. Impressed with UNMACA's reform efforts, and seeing the need to fill the gap in funding to NGOs left by USAID, many donors have stepped into the breach. "In fact," said Chris Stephens of UNMAS, "we've seen in the last three to six months an increase in support of the UN-led process."[107]

### 3.4. Summary

Starting with RONCO in 2002 and widening with an influx of companies from 2005 onwards, a range of private for-profit actors have entered the demining market in Afghanistan, mostly working on tasks for the Coalition forces. While these have largely been international companies, nascent Afghan commercial entities have begun to form. The following sections will examine the record of this new demining commercial sector, in comparison with the international and local NGOs.

## *4. Price and Productivity*

It has become conventional wisdom that contracting out public services increases competition and thus leads to improvements in efficiency and price. In many cases this is indeed true.[108] This assumption has also been prevalent in the mine action sector,[109]

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[103] This is based on commercial self-reporting from several companies, and an extrapolation from their figures to companies which did not respond to the author's inquiries. Thus this is a rough estimate.

[104] USAID. (22 September 2006) "USAID Awards $1.4 Billion Contract for Infrastructure in Afghanistan." <http://www.usaid.gov/press/releases/2006/pr060922.html>.

[105] USAID. (6 February 2007) "Strategic Provincial Roads-South & East Afghanistan (SPR-SEA)." <http://www.grants.gov/search/search.do?oppId=12485&mode=VIEW>.

[106] U.S. Department of Defense, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs). (28 March 2007) "Contracts." <http://www.defenselink.mil/contracts/contract.aspx?contractid=3483>.

[107] Stephens 2007.

[108] Hodge, G.A. (2000) *Privatization: An International Review of Performance*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press. p. 107; World Bank 1997, p. 6; Carnaghan, R. & Bracewell-Milnes, B. (1996) "Conclusions and Recommendations." *Privatization: Critical Perspectives on the World Economy.* Vol. II. Edited by Yarrow, G. & Jasiński, P. London, Routledge. p. 318-319; Dinavo, J.V. (1995) *Privatization in Developing Countries: Its Impact on Economic Development and Democracy.* Westport, Connecticut, Praeger. p. 14-17; Bendick, M., Jr. (1989) "Privatizing the Delivery of Social Welfare Services: An Idea to

where a significant portion of mine clearance is contracted to commercial companies. Indeed, according to one study, "the mine action sector is probably the most commercialised sector of international humanitarian assistance."[110]

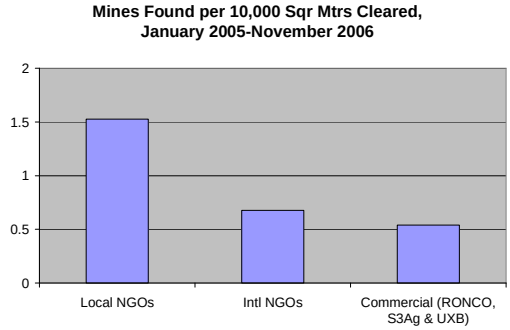
The logic behind commercial contracting seems to be borne out in Afghanistan by simple price comparisons given to the author anecdotally by interviewees. It is widely believed that commercial companies are able to conduct clearance at a lower price and faster than the UN-led system. Despite considerable efforts to attain it, the author was unable to get reliable data to allow for a broad country-wide comparison. Complicating factors include the difficulty of establishing comparability in the type of areas cleared and the absence of data separating the cost of NGO minefield clearance (which is much more expensive and time-consuming) from battle area clearance, .

It is possible that a part of the impression that NGO clearance is slower and more expensive maybe partly due to commercials preferring simpler tasks. For example, because of liability concerns, some organizations are contracting commercial demining even when there is little chance of actual contamination. Paul Molam of the British/Zimbabwe firm MineTech said,

> A lot of the work the commercials are doing, you know there's nothing there, but before the [US Army] Corps of Engineers will allow a [construction] contractor onto an area, you've got to go and put your assets over the ground although you know there's nothing there.[111]

The below graphs show that in the last couple years local NGOs have been clearing a larger amount of ordnance from its tasks than commercials. This can sometimes, though not always, be a rough proxy for the difficulty of a task.

**Figure 13: Comparing the 'Density' of NGO and Commercial Clearance Tasks[112]**




Another indicator that commercial organizations may be doing simpler tasks is to look at the type of task completed. Battle area clearance (BAC), which is done in areas where there may be unexploded ordnance but little chance of mine contamination, is more easily mechanized, has less stringent safety regulations and can be completed faster

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Be Taken Seriously." *Privatization and the Welfare State.* Edited by Kamerman, S.B. & Kahn, A.J. Princeton, Princeton University Press. p. 107.

[109] Fitz-Gerald & Neal 2000.

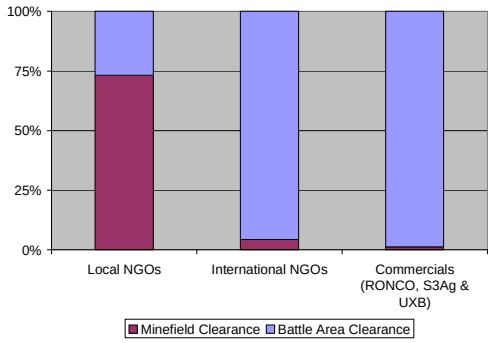
[110] Horwood, C. (March 2000) "Humanitarian Mine Action: The First Decade of a New Sector in Humanitarian Aid." *RRN Network Paper.* 32.p. 31.

[111] Molam, P. (7 December 2006) Comment at presentation of preliminary research findings by author to the UN Mine Action Center for Afghanistan (UNMACA).

[112] Data on NGO clearance from: UNMACA. (November 2006) IMSMA Database. Data queries on clearance area. Data on commercial clearance was self-reported by email to the author by the companies.

than minefield clearance. The following graphs show that the commercial companies cleared much less minefield area than NGOs as a percentage of the total area they cleared:

**Figure 14: Type of Clearance Conducted as a Percentage of Total Area Cleared, by Organization Type. January 2005 to November 2006.** [113]

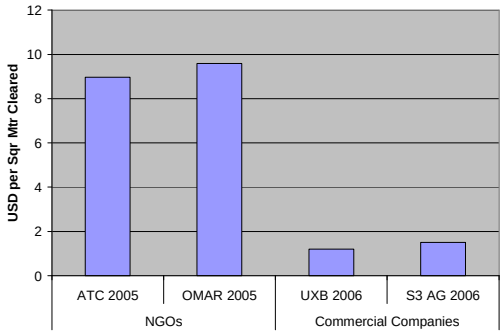



That the commercials may be doing simpler tasks should not necessarily be taken as a criticism of them. In fact, it may be a wise division of labor to focus commercial demining on tasks that can be done quickly and allow humanitarian NGOs to focus on slower, more difficult ones. Moreover, getting NGOs to do tasks where there is minimal risk of contamination, such as those mentioned by Mowlam above, would be a waste of humanitarian resources.

The only vaguely and comparable reliable data the author was able to obtain in order to compare costs was for clearance at Kabul International Airport. The NGOs ATC and OMAR were clearing civilian areas of the airport while several commercial companies were clearing adjacent military areas. Thus the terrain is similar, and on both sides, most of the contamination was from UXO rather than mines. In this very limited case, NGO clearance was indeed significantly more expensive. However, to make a generalization from this one particular place in a very large country, especially since the NGO clearance data was for the year prior to the commercial data, would be unwise. Thus the following graph is shown only as a tentative illustration.

[113] Data on NGO clearance from: UNMACA. (November 2006) IMSMA Database. Data queries on clearance area. Data on commercial clearance was self-reported by email to the author by the companies.

**Figure 15: Tentative Price Comparisons between NGO and Commercial Clearance at Kabul International Airport [114]**

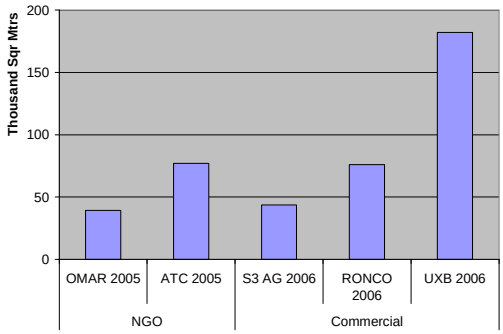



If the anecdotal and Kabul International Airport data on prices is correct, how were commercials able to achieve a lower price for demining while paying their staff as much as 50% more? Some commercials have made some cost savings by streamlining administration or by not paying into a pension fund. More importantly, commercial companies claim they have a higher speed of clearance. Commercial organizations argue that due to the profit motive, they use labor more efficiently and are more likely to use new technologies such as mechanical clearance. As Bob Gannon of RONCO said, "for a commercial company you get paid to do a job. The quicker you do that job, the better your profit is, the longer it takes you to do that job, the more it eats into your profit." He estimates that RONCO deminers probably work around three hours more in a work day than NGO deminers, due to fewer and shorter breaks and beginning the work day when deminers arrive on site, rather than when they leave the base camp.[115]

Again, systematic comparison is difficult, as the author was not able to gain sufficient data to make comparisons between NGOs and commercials based on square meters cleared per work-hour. The only comparison the author was able to make was using data from Kabul International Airport. Note that this is may be specific to this particular location, and the NGO clearance data was for the year prior to the commercial data. It does appear that some commercial companies were able to achieve a higher speed of clearance, but the following graph is far from conclusive.

[114] Data on NGO clearance from: UNMACA. (November 2006) IMSMA Database. Data queries on clearance area. Approximation of NGO cost of clearance from list of KAIA NGO contracts shown to author by UNMACA source. Data on commercial clearance and cost was self-reported by email to the author by the companies.
[115] Gannon 2006.

**Figure 16: Comparing the Speed of NGO and Commercial Clearance at Kabul International Airport[116]**




Due to the lack of a larger dataset, one should take the price and speed data from this section with a very large grain of salt. One must be careful about taking such statistics about the relative price and speed of commercial and NGO operations too seriously, because not all square meters cleared are alike. Until there is better data collection by UNMACA, true comparison of like with like will be impossible.

## 4.4. Summary

From the admittedly rough data obtained by the author, it is possible that the commercial companies may have been able to clear areas of mines and UXO at a faster rate, and at a lower price than NGOs in Afghanistan. However, at least a portion of this increased productivity and lowered price may be the result of commercial companies preference for battle area clearance and tasks that have fewer mines and UXO per square meter. Better data gathering and analysis and UNMACA is needed on cost and speed of (especially commercial) clearance before proper comparisons can be made.

**Figure 17: Russian-made PMN-2 anti-personnel landmine. Kabul, Afghanistan, 2006**

[116] Data on NGO clearance from: UNMACA. (November 2006) IMSMA Database. Data queries on clearance area and dates. Data on commercial clearance and cost was self-reported by email to the author by the companies.

## *5. Specialization and Innovation*

In addition to the possibility of increased productivity and lowered prices, there are other, less quantifiable benefits from the influx of commercial actors. By broadening the market, there is greater potential for different actors to specialize according to their respective comparative advantages. If one company is particularly good at manual demining and another in canine demining, each can concentrate on excellence in their specific niche. This gives added value to the client, who is then able to pick and choose specific service providers according to the needs of the task.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous sections, there is considerable logic in having commercial companies specialize on military demining, tasks with little risk of contamination and battle area clearance. This would allow humanitarian demining to focus more carefully on high human impact demining, while still allow actors with other priorities to get demining done.

Finally, the profit motive and drive to cut costs can spur innovation. The commercial companies in Afghanistan are already more likely than the NGOs to adopt and use new detection and clearance technologies. As these are tested in the field they can bring much needed technological progress to Afghan demining. Since many of the commercial companies are multinational, with programs all over the world, they are far more likely to bring in knowledge and innovation developed outside of Afghanistan. The local NGOs do not have as well developed international connections and so have more difficulty accessing the latest research and development. That said, international NGOs, such as HALO Trust and Danish Demining Group have also shown an ability to adopt new innovations.

### 5.1 Summary

The commercialization of demining in Afghanistan may bring three additional benefits that are less quantifiable than price and productivity:

1) Specialization of organizations based on comparative advantage,
2) Greater innovation due to the profit motive,
3) Importation of knowledge and innovation developed outside Afghanistan.

## *6. Quality and Safety*

While there may be benefits to commercialization, the author's research has uncovered significant costs. Most importantly, simple price comparisons do not take into account the human cost, in lowered safety, of contracting out potentially hazardous operations like demining – as one study on privatization said, "other values than efficiency are at stake."[117] Indeed, the larger literature on public service privatization has generally found that cost savings in contracting out often come with the risk of reduction in quality and/or safety. The author's investigations found this to be the case in Bosnian demining, where the drive for profit appeared to have created a strong incentive to cut corners and speed up the process in ways that made it more dangerous.[118] Surprisingly, USAID, a major driver of commercialization, admitted they had not carried out any

[117] Smith, S.R. & Lipsky, M. (1993) *Nonprofits for Hire: The Welfare State in the Age of Contracting.* Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press. p. 11.
[118] Bolton & Griffiths 2006.

studies to examine whether their move toward a tendering rather than a grant system would result in any reduction in safety.[119]

While this problem can sometimes be solved by creating strong regulation systems, an effect of commercializing Afghan demining has been to erode the regulatory power of UNMACA. UNMACA still has the power to take accreditation away from companies that fail to perform to the Afghanistan Mine Action Standards (AMAS), but it does not have the same kind of control over companies as it does over the NGOs, because it does not fund them. Therefore, UNMACA has much fewer levers to impose conditionalities on companies. This has been compounded by a lack of coordination between commercial organizations and the UNMACA. Though the UN says the situation is improving, until recently, many organizations that were contracting commercial demining did not think to include contract clauses requiring coordination with and submission of data to the UNMACA. UNMACA chief of operations, Mohammad Sediq said that coordinating the commercial companies has been "difficult" and that they are "not properly reporting to us."[120]

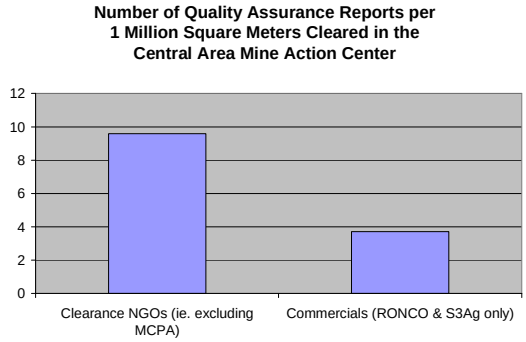
As a result, some commercial demining tasks were begun without UNMACA's knowledge. Chris Stephens of UNMAS said, "There has certainly been multiple incidents where an organization will come us and say 'we need a clearance certificate for our task that we have completed,' because we have the responsibility for providing clearance certificates, and we will go, 'What task?'"[121] The author also overheard an expatriate commercial demining employee express confusion and incredulity about why he was required to have UNMACA inspectors visit the site, or have independent certification of clearance.

Finally, UNMACA has difficulty keeping track of demining work on US military bases. The Afghan nationals working as UNMACA's quality assurance inspectors find it difficult to gain the security clearance to do spot checks. [122] The US military has its own mine action center based at Bagram that controls demining on US bases, but coordination and information sharing between them and UNMACA has been patchy. Therefore, despite being the public body mandated by the Afghan government to be ultimately responsible for demining on Afghan territory, the Coalition bases have a parallel and stove-piped system.

In sum, the commercial companies have been subject to far less oversight than the NGOs. The following graph shows that in 2005 (the only year where complete quality assurance data was available at the time of the fieldwork) quality management investigation teams from the Central Area Mine Action Team did far fewer spotchecks on commercial companies than NGOs.

[119] Hutson 2006.
[120] Sediq 2006.
[121] Stephens 2007.
[122] Sediq 2006

**Figure 18: Level of Quality Assurance Surveillance over NGOs and Commercial Companies[123]**




Even if there was a higher level of quality assurance inspection on commercials, at the time of writing, the quality assurance data had not been centralized and digitized. It existed only as paper records in the Area Mine Action Centers (AMACs) – branch offices of UNMACA – out in the field. Thus sophisticated analysis of a companies' track record was difficult. Chris Stephens of UNMAS said that centralizing and computerizing this data was a priority, but admitted:

> When the structure was set up, it was old school. Communications were only through HF radio, you didn't have internet out in the field, the NGOs didn't have internet, etc. The problem is that we've had a carry over of that approach. … So we're restructuring the infrastructure of the AMACs to increase the ability of them to digitally answer all the information flow requirements the UNMACA has.[124]

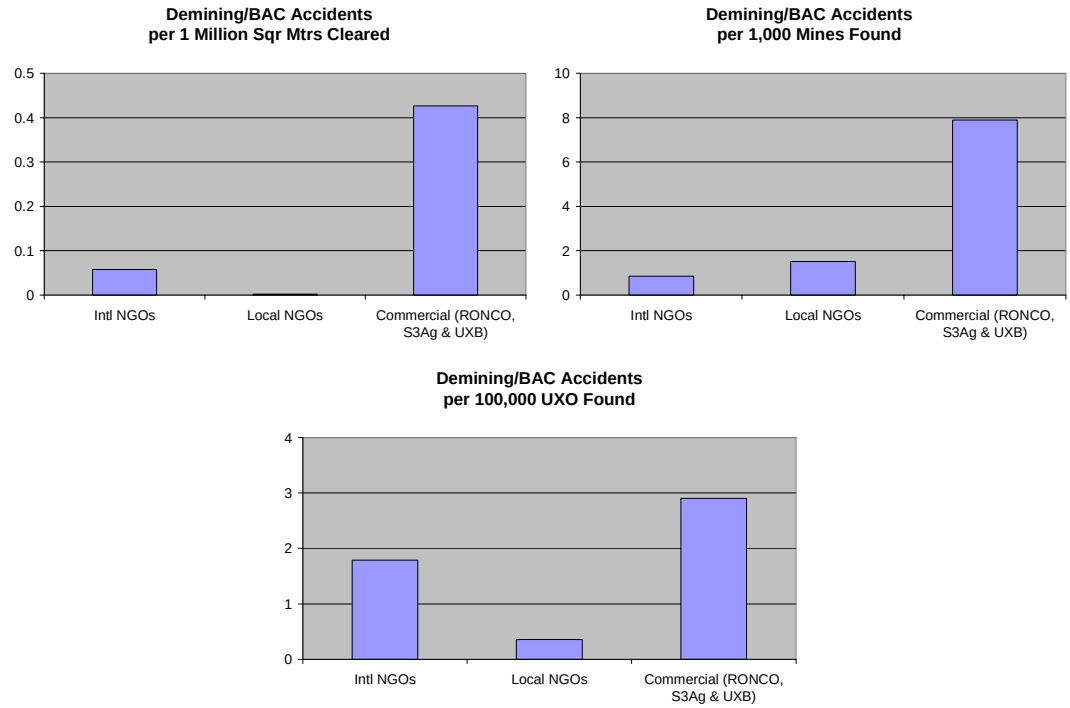
It is important to note that many of the clients of commercial demining hire their own independent quality assurance personnel to maintain a level of supervision on the site. For instance, at a RONCO site visited by the author, the client's expatriate quality assurance inspector was on the site all day. It is possible then, that some commercial sites are under even greater scrutiny than the Afghan NGOs. However, the problem with this system is that it is decentralized and privatized – there is no central repository comparable to UNMACA, where these private quality assurance personnel file their reports. Indeed, the limited attempts by the author to obtain access to their reports were unfruitful. Therefore, it is much more difficult to obtain information about the quality records of the companies than NGOs, creating what economists call 'information asymmetries' – information about the quality of work is not available to all potential clients. The danger implicit in such market distortions in information are displayed in the following subsections, which show, using accident records and quality assurance reports, how commercial demining in Afghanistan appears to carry greater safety risks than demining by local and international NGOs.

[123] Data on NGO clearance from: UNMACA. (November 2006) IMSMA Database. Data queries on clearance area. Data on commercial clearance was self-reported by email to the author by the companies. Quality assurance report data provided to the author by UNMACA's Kabul Area Mine Action Center (AMAC).
[124] Stephens 2007

## 6.1. Accident Records

Analysis of demining accidents has suggested that in excess of 80% might be considered avoidable, caused by lack of proper management, supervision or training.[125] On this basis, a relatively poor safety record may be a proxy for poor quality demining. Consistent with the author's findings in Bosnia,[126] a comparison of accidents per area or ordnance cleared shows that commercial companies had a significantly poorer safety record in Afghanistan than international and local NGOs. It is possible that this is due to the new arrival of commercial companies – it may take some time for them to get used to the conditions in Afghanistan. However, it is also possible that the increased speed at which commercial demining companies have worked in Afghanistan has led to reduced safety. As one NGO director said, the commercial companies "are not magicians" and thus increased speed may come with a cost.[127] The fact that USAID has decided to use commercial companies instead of NGOs in spite of this bad run of accidents is a cause for concern.

**Figure 19: Accident Record by Organization Type, January 2005 to November 2006** [128]




[125] Maslen 2004, p. 50; Smith, A. (June 2000) "The Facts on Protection Needs in Humanitarian Demining." *Journal of Mine Action*. Issue 4.2. <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/4.2/focus/PN/protectneeds.htm>. Trevelyan, J. (June 2000) "Reducing Accidents in Demining: Achievements in Afghanistan." *Journal of Mine Action*. Issue 4.2. <http://maic.jmu.edu/journal/4.2/Focus/Accidents/accidents.htm>.

[126] Bolton & Griffiths 2006.

[127] Local NGO Worker 2006.

[128] Mine and UXO data is for ordnance found in clearance only, not stockpile destruction or EOD operations. Data on accidents from: UNMACA. (November 2006) "Demining Accidents, Incidents, IED attacks and Major Non-Demining Accidents." Spreadsheet given to author. Data on NGO clearance from: UNMACA. (November 2006) IMSMA Database. Data queries on clearance area. Data on commercial clearance was self-reported by email to the author by the companies.

While accidents can serve as a good proxy for demining quality, they are still rather random and unpredictable events. The data in the next subsection, which uses a direct measure of quality, suggests that the commercials' poor accident record is unlikely to be simply bad luck.

## 6.2. Quality Assurance Reports

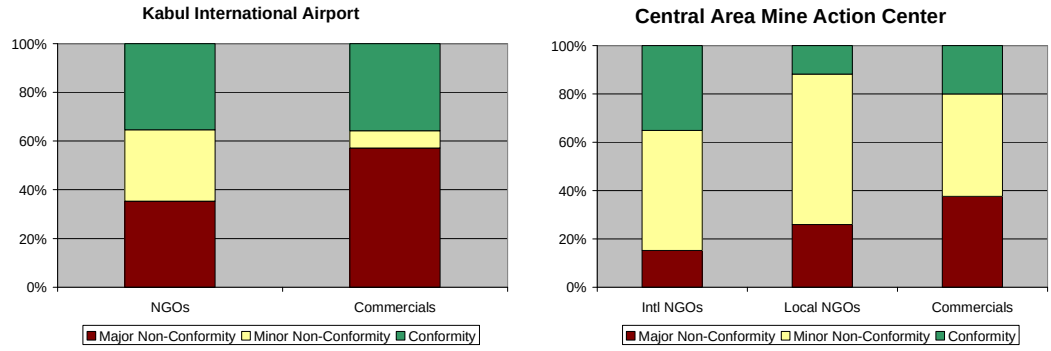
A key UNMACA supervisory mechanism is the teams of quality management specialists in each of its seven Area Mine Action Centers (AMACs) spread out across the country. These teams carry out on-site quality assurance spot-checks on demining organizations as clearance is in process. If the organization is in compliance with the appropriate mine action standards, they issue a Conformity Report. If there are small infractions of the standards, they will issue a Minor Non-Conformity Report, indicating the errors observed and suggested ways to correct them. For infractions that pose a direct threat to life – either a deminer's or a future user of the land – the quality management team will issue a Major Non-Conformity Report.

Unfortunately, at the time of the author's fieldwork the Quality Assurance reports were not all centralized at UNMACA headquarters, due to the decentralized nature of the data collection and some technical problems setting up a central database. Therefore, a country-wide comparison of quality assurance reports was not possible at the time of writing. However, the author was able to obtain the paper records for 2005 and 2006 (till September) for the Central AMAC, which covers Kabul, Kapisa, Parwan, Bamyan, Wardak and Logar provinces. The Central AMAC region is a good case study for comparison as some 36% of mine affected communities are located there[129] and around 42% of all demining and battle area clearance (in terms of square meters) in 2005 and 2006 occurred there.[130] Moreover, every demining actor, NGO and commercial, carried out demining and battle area clearance in this region in 2005 and 2006. It is therefore probable that the Central AMAC is relatively representative of Afghan demining as a whole. Moreover, the author believes this dataset to be the most reliable of the quantitative data used in this paper.

The following graphs show the percentage distribution of Central AMAC Quality Assurance reports, by organizational type. It shows that both in the Central region in general, and at the Kabul International Airport (as a smaller case study where NGOs and commercials worked in a similar location), commercial companies had a significantly higher rate of Major Non-Conformity. That is, according to the Central AMAC quality management specialists, the commercial companies were more likely to engage in activities that could pose a direct threat to the lives of deminers or future users of cleared land:[131]

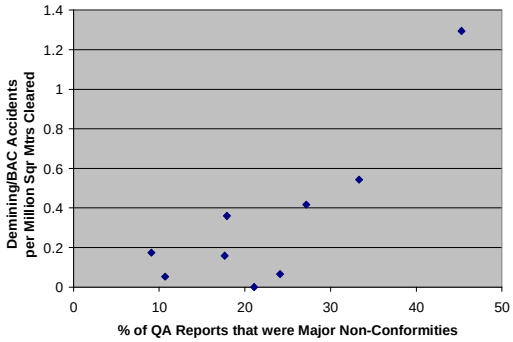
[129] Survey Action Center 2006, p. 21.
[130] UNMACA IMSMA Database. (November 2006) Data queries on clearance area and devices.
[131] One should note that there is a possibility that, and there were some anecdotal reports of, the quality management inspectors having a bias against commercial companies, because they are unfamiliar with the new technologies they used. A recent strategic planning meeting held in Dubai also identified the quality management teams as a major weakness of UNMACA. The NGO Danish Demining Group is starting a project to build the capacity of the quality management teams and one element of the training will be to familiarize them with the new technologies used by commercial companies.

**Figure 20: Distribution of Quality Assurance Reports by the Central Area Mine Action Center[132]**




The quality inspection reports also suggest that the higher accident rates of commercials cited in the previous sub-section are not simply due to random coincidence. The below graphs indicate some correlation between major non-conformity rates and accident rates.

**Figure 21: The Effect of Major Non-Conformity with Standing Operating Procedures on Accident Rates, January 2005-September 2006[133]**




It should be noted that what was true in general was not necessarily true in particular. For example, RONCO, a commercial company, had a better quality assurance record in the Central AMAC region than the average international NGO, and AREA (an NGO UNMACA cut off demining funding to in 2005) had a worse record than the average commercial company.[134]

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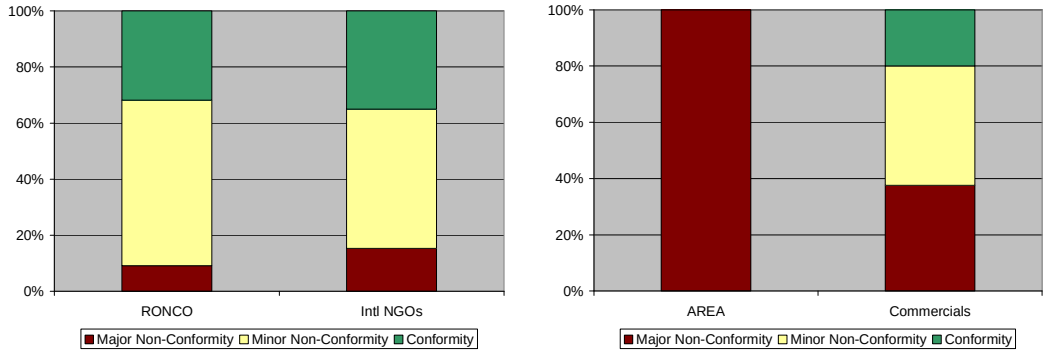
[132] Quality assurance report data provided to the author by UNMACA's Kabul Area Mine Action Center (AMAC).

[133] Quality assurance report data provided to the author by UNMACA's Kabul Area Mine Action Center (AMAC). Of the commercial companies only S3AG, RONCO and UXB were included because data on the others was lacking. UXB data is only for 2006. MCPA and AREA were excluded due to the very low levels of clearance work in the period. UXB was excluded from the Demining/BAC accidents per 1,000 mines found graph because the data point skewed the dataset excessively in favor of the correlation between the two variables.

[134] Quality assurance report data provided to the author by UNMACA's Kabul Area Mine Action Center (AMAC). It is worth noting that there were only two quality assurance reports about AREA, so there is likely to be a very large margin of error. Moreover, some have alleged that UNMACA had a bias against AREA, because it distrusted the community-based model of demining it used.

**Figure 22: Distribution of Quality Assurance Reports by the Central Area Mine Action Center[135]**




It is also worth noting that though the Quality Assurance reports are a direct measure of quality, the spot-checks are administered by people and thus naturally risk problems of bias. It is possible that due to their unfamiliarity with commercial companies and their often new techniques and mechanization, the quality management specialists judged them more harshly than the NGOs. However, the margin of error due to human bias is reduced somewhat by the fact that there were 17 quality management teams doing checks in the Central region – not just one person. Therefore, it is possible that the bias of different teams may somewhat counterbalance each other.

## 6.3. An Example of Commercial Corner-Cutting

While the statistics on accidents and quality control non-conformity point to the possibility of corner-cutting in clearance activities, they only paint a broad picture. However, the author visited many demining sites, both NGO and commercial, in the greater Kabul region and was able to record on camera a particularly dangerous example of corner-cutting by an American company, called here Company X. Company X was clearing a military area of Kabul International Airport on a NATO contract with the US Air Force. They were new to Afghanistan, and had little in the way of assets – they had to rent personal protective equipment from another commercial company. However, when interviewed, the company's demining operations manager told the author that Company X was able to clear areas much quicker and more cheaply than the Afghan NGOs, even though they paid their deminers as much as 30% more. He attributed their speed to effective use of mechanical technologies and the "motivation that a privately owned company has got." He assured the author that the increased speed did not come at a cost to safety, "because of the simple reason that all of our safety procedures, our standard operating procedures are set up specifically for mechanical clearance operations."[136]

However, when shown around their battle area clearance site, the author was shocked to find several life-endangering deviations from internationally recognized mine action standards. Even more disturbingly, a report in the files of the Central AMAC outlined

[135] Quality assurance report data provided to the author by UNMACA's Kabul Area Mine Action Center (AMAC).
[136] Source X. (24 November 2006) Personal interview with the author in Kabul, Afghanistan.

observations of similar poor practice three or four months earlier. For instance, on 3 August 2006, the AMAC report observed, "Since the bulldozer machine which was busy in clearance of the task was un-armoured, it was unsuitable for mine clearance program."[137]

However, on 28 October 2006, the author took this picture of a Company X digger excavating a bunker in a battle area. Note that despite the risk of there being unexploded ordnance buried in the ground being excavated, the digger's cab is unarmored, the cab door is open, and the digger's mechanic is hanging out of the door while the digger is in operation:

**Figure 23: Company X Battle Clearance at Kabul International Airport, 22 October 2006**


In the same August report, the Kabul AMAC team observed that "The relevant site supervisor and his colleagues were standing near the machine without PPE [Personal Protective Equipment] and maintaining safety distance."[138] On 24 November 2006, the author was told by the demining operations manager that the digger in the photograph below was excavating a suspected mine line. He said it was highly unlikely that there were any mines there. However, standard operating procedures still must be followed at all times. Note that the digger, while this time armored, again has its door open, and the machines' spotter, lacking a visor, is not wearing the required PPE.

[137] Kabul Central Area Mine Action Center (AMAC) Quality Management Investigation Team (QMIT) 15. (3 August 2006) "Observation Form." Available from Kabul AMAC.
[138] Kabul AMAC QMIT 15 2006.

**Figure 24: Company X Mineline Clearance at Kabul International Airport, 24 November 2006**


While the author was told that UNMACA was investigating Company X's safety procedures, the fact that it was able to continue operating with poor safety practices for so long indicates the lack of supervision and authority UNMACA had over Company X. While this case may be a particularly severe example, it shows that in the drive for speed and profit-making there is a danger that some companies, despite being new to the country and having less than ideal safety practices, can operate unhindered for a long time.

## 6.4. Summary

There is a danger that without proper control and oversight, the increased productivity and lower price of commercial demining compared with NGO clearance may come with a human cost – a loss of safety. This is suggested a) by accident records, b) by quality control checks and c) by the case study of Company X. That said, there are some exceptions, RONCO's quality assurance record in the central region is, for instance, praiseworthy.

The problems with commercial companies are not likely to be solved overnight, as the UNMACA's quality assurance system is stretched and does not yet have a centralized data processing capability. Thus sophisticated analysis and surveillance of non-compliance with demining procedures is currently very difficult. As a result, poor performing contractors may not be subject to the appropriate disciplines of regulation and competition.

# *7. The Commodification of Demining*

Commercializing the market for demining in Afghanistan will likely lead to a corollary commodification of demining. The UNMACA system, implemented through NGOs, operates like a government public service. Beneficiaries of demining do not pay for the service, and UNMACA claims prioritization is largely done on an assessment of need and the potential humanitarian and socio-economic benefits of mine clearance. Thus the beneficiaries' ability to pay for the service should not be reflected in priorities, or the allocation of demining resources. This system could be beneficial to the poor who could not afford the high price of clearing minefields that threatened their lives and livelihood.

UNMACA has drawn the criticism that is common of many public services, that its priority-setting was non-transparent, was occasionally influenced inappropriately and that it focused more on the processes of reconstructing destroyed infrastructure (which benefits those who were privileged to have infrastructure previously) than providing new infrastructure for the poor (which expands access to infrastructure). However, despite these admittedly serious problems, there still existed elements of fairness in the distribution of demining resources – at least lip service to the allocation by need, not ability to pay.[139] Moreover, the completion of the Afghanistan Landmine Impact Survey in late 2005, which categorized communities according to the impact of landmines on public safety and socio-economic development, has allowed for more precise targeting of priorities.[140]

The commercialization of demining changes this system. By setting up a mixed market system, persons or organizations that want demining performed immediately no longer have to wait for higher priority tasks to be completed first. If they have the ability, they can pay for demining, by a commercial operator, to occur immediately. Demining has become a purchasable commodity. For instance, the Afghan telecommunications company Roshan has unilaterally contracted demining with commercial companies. The advantage is that this introduces flexibility into the system, and provides a two-track system, like the mixed public and private health care system in Britain. Those who have money do not need to wait in line.

**Figure 25: HALO Trust Deminer at Work. Shomali Valley, Afghanistan, 2006.**

Since there is a surplus of trained deminers in the market, at this point there is not too much of a danger of the commercial market drawing significant human and physical resources away from the humanitarian demining system. In fact, the commercial capacity has soaked up some of the excess labor created by the UN-sponsored demobilization program that trained ex-soldiers to be deminers.[141] However, since the commercial

[139] Sediq 2006.
[140] Survey Action Center 2006.
[141] From 2004-2005, UNDP funded the training of demobilized combatants as deminers, placing them within mine action NGOs. However, lack of funding has meant that many of these recent ex-combatant

operators pay more, there is a danger that the better quality people will be drawn away from the humanitarian sector and into the commercial sector – just as the commercial legal sector draws the best lawyers away from public defense offices in the US and Britain. Thus there will be significant incentive for the best deminers to abandon the NGOs, redistributing the best talent to the commercial sector. There has already been some bad feeling about this, one local NGO director complained that the commercials "steal the expertise" from the NGOs.[142] Chief of staff Kerei Ruru said that while there has been "a wee bit" of "poaching of talent," UNMACA will prevent this from continuing through "a gentleman's agreement" that "can be enforced, because we're the licensing body."[143] However, it is not necessarily certain that future UNMACA chiefs would honor this commitment.

Moreover, if other donors pull their money out of the UN Voluntary Trust Fund, the UN's control over the prioritization of demining could erode as bilateral donors pick priorities themselves and the UN is less able to afford a large staff. This could lead to a loss of coordination and a distortion of demining priorities. The UN's ability to discipline contractors that pull human resources away from the humanitarian sector will also be reduced.

Finally, the commodification of demining turns demining into a profitmaking activity rather than a public service. Some observers have been disturbed by this idea, especially concerned that international commercial companies are repatriating profits out of Afghanistan, when there would be considerable benefit to reinvest that money in-country. For instance, MDC director Shohab Hakimi said, "If the donors say this money is for Afghanistan…the money should be spent in the country and not go out."[144] Some participants at a recent strategic planning workshop on Afghan demining worried that if demining is seen as a profitmaking activity, humanitarian donors may begin to withdraw from supporting it.[145]

## 7.1. Summary

Thus it is possible that the commercialization of demining will turn mine and UXO clearance into a purchasable commodity, making it easier for those with access to significant financial resources to change priorities. It is possible that this could lead to a loss of the attempted fairness in the UNMACA system, which distributed demining with at least some consideration of need, rather than ability to pay. UNMACA chief of staff Kerei Ruru assured the author that UNMACA plans to maintain the NGO system at its "current capacity," but admitted this was reliant on them being able to "keep getting donor funding to support that."[146]

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deminers are now unemployed. UNMACA has encouraged commercial companies to hire from this pool, rather than take deminers from the NGOs. Powell 2006. For more details on the UNDP-funded program, see: Strand, A. (2004) "Transforming Local Relationships: Reintegration of Combatants through Mine Action in Afghanistan." *Preparing the Ground for Peace: Mine Action in Support of Peacebuilding*. Eds. Harpviken, K.B. & Roberts, R. Oslo, PRIO.

[142] Local NGO Worker 2006.

[143] Ruru 2006.

[144] Local NGO Worker 2006.

[145] Cranfield University 2006, p. 8.

[146] Ruru 2006.

## 8. The Securitization of Aid

Just as the early US funding for demining in Afghanistan in the late 1980s was motivated by a broader war effort, current US assistance to the country is motivated largely by security objectives. Afghanistan is seen as a location of immense strategic importance in the Global War on Terror – "key to the U.S. top-priority goal of promoting stability and democracy in the Middle East and Central Asian regions."[147] Thus US aid to the country has bolstered its broader strategic objectives of promoting political stability, countering the blooming narcotics trade and fostering support for the US-led effort to eliminate Al Qaeda and the Taliban insurgency. The first paragraph of USAID's current Strategic Plan for Afghanistan asserts that USAID is "a critical partner" in the "fight against terrorism and tyranny." The plan, identifying a "Nexus between security and reconstruction and development," states that all of USAID's activities are "geared towards increasing security."[148]

Likewise, much demining assistance given to Afghanistan after 2001 has focused on US security priorities. The funding from the military, contracted through commercial companies, has been for clearing bases and airstrips. Moreover, UXB received a sub-contract from DynCorp to provide demining and explosive ordnance disposal services to US-funded forced poppy eradication efforts.[149] Funding from civilian agencies also fits into supporting the US's broader security objectives. As noted before, the increase in funding for insecure ammunition disposal aims to deny weapons to the insurgency. The US State Department has also announced plans to support "IED [Improvised Explosive Device] threat reduction efforts" – IEDs pose a major threat to NATO forces – as part of its overall mine action strategy.[150]

The major advantage of the US' re-engagement in Afghanistan is that that it has made significant resources available. For the last few years, the US has provided over a quarter of the funding for demining in Afghanistan. US leadership encourages other countries to put additional money forward. Indeed, had the US not re-engaged with Afghanistan's politics and development, and lobbying other countries to do so, it is likely that UNMACA would have continued at its pre-9/11 level *ad infinitum*, or slowly fizzled away.

Moreover, Bob Gannon of RONCO argues that the work commercial deminers are doing, by supporting the stabilization of Afghanistan, has a greater impact on the peace process than NGO clearance. Since security is a key problem for the Afghan people, he believes it is important that demining supports the Coalition and particularly the nascent Afghan security forces:

> If you can get a stable government in a country then it's going to go a long way towards bringing proper peace. And the way to get a stable government, is to make sure the government's got the land, the property it needs to put good governance in place.[151]

However, there are several problems with aid motivated by security concerns. Firstly, it means there are influences on priorities other than pure humanitarian need. By taking money out of the UN-led system, USAID will be directing its funds to support the US

[147] USAID 2005, p. 4.
[148] USAID 2005, p. 1, 5.
[149] Wanley, C. (30 October 2006) Personal interview with author in Kabul, Afghanistan.
[150] Cranfield University 2006, p. 4.
[151] Gannon 2006.

reconstruction efforts. While Afghanistan certainly needs the roads, powerlines, schools and clinics built by these efforts, studies by other investigators have shown that many of these massive projects seem to be more for political and symbolic, rather than humanitarian, impact, sometimes affecting the quality of the work.[152] Indeed, studies by UNDP/World Bank and MCPA have shown that the highest economic returns from come from focusing demining efforts on irrigation and irrigated agriculture, not roads, which USAID has concentrated on.[153] If other donors pull their money out of the UN-led program and focus on supporting their particular national interests in Afghanistan, who will advocate for a needs-based demining that prioritizes the poor, refugee or at-risk?

Secondly, one must problematize the word 'security' when used by the US and its coalition. There is no doubt that security is in desperate need in Afghanistan. However, one must question whose security the US is aiming to secure. For instance, a significant portion of US troops and military budget are assigned to the hunt for Bin Laden and Al Qaeda, which affects the national security of the US more than human security of the Afghan people.[154] By shifting the focus of US-funded demining away from the needs-based system of the UN to supporting the Coalition's military objectives, the US is prioritizing its own security over that of the Afghan people. While this is natural for a state to do, it is not necessarily the most beneficial option for Afghanistan. The US's choice of the Pakistan-based mujahideen parties as the implementers of their cross-border humanitarian aid in the 1980s should offer a warning. Significant portions of assistance went to Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, who went on to commit terrible atrocities in the post-Communist era and is now fighting the US-led coalition.

Thirdly, there is a danger that Afghan demining may lose its precious and long-cultivated neutrality if deminers are seen to be too close to the Coalition. Insurgents will not have to think hard to see that demining will play an integral role in bringing new US-funded infrastructure throughout the country. US-funded roads will improve the logistical capability of the Coalition, new schools will provide the Coalition-sponsored government the opportunity to wean children away from Islamist instruction. These are all potentially good things, but the resurgent Taliban, which are following a spoiler strategy, may begin to target deminers to prevent further reconstruction efforts. One could argue that it is good to put commercial contractors rather than NGOs on tasks that will draw fire, but it is possible that the blurring lines between the Coalition and deminers may negatively affect all deminers, not just the commercial ones. Already, according to UNMACA data, between January and November 2006 more demining personnel died in terrorist attacks than demining accidents.

Fourthly, as commercial companies doing military demining begin to bid on US civilian reconstruction tasks, this could even further blur the lines between military and civilian work. When Afghans see the same companies doing civilian demining providing services to the military the potential for misunderstanding is great.[155] The April 2007

[152] See, for instance, this damning report on the privatization of the reconstruction process in Afghanistan: Nawa, F. (6 October 2006) *Afghanistan, Inc.: A Corpwatch Investigative Report*. <http://s3.amazonaws.com/corpwatch.org/downloads/AfghanistanINCfinalsmall.pdf>. Also: Maley, W. (2006) *Rescuing Afghanistan*. London, C. Hurst & Co. p. 98-99.

[153] GICHD 2004, pp. 104-105. MCPA 1999.

[154] Christian Aid 2004, pp. 40-51.

[155] For descriptions of the problems with mixing security and reconstruction efforts, from a variety of perspectives, see: McNerney, M.J. (Winter 2005-06) "Stabilization and Reconstruction in Afghanistan: Are

ambush of a RONCO demining team by "dozens of Taliban militants" in western Farah province does not bode well, though it is not clear whether RONCO itself was the intended target.[156]

Many of these companies, including DynCorp, ArmorGroup and RONCO, have other divisions that are providing private security services and several companies' staff also carry arms. Mohammed Sediq of UNMACA worries that a key to mine action's success in Afghanistan, its "flag of impartiality and neutrality," may be eroded by the image of these companies.[157] For instance, all the DynCorp mine action staff have to take weapons training, carry a pistol and rifle while traveling and the team have access to a DynCorp rapid reaction force if they come under attack.[158] DynCorp itself has come under a great deal of criticism for its Afghan security operations.[159] ArmorGroup has an entire military style-barracks on Kabul's outskirts. RONCO provides static guards around Kabul and provides bomb detection dogs to security companies guarding the US embassy and other sites.[160] Thus some Afghans may jump to the conclusion that demining is an activity related to private security operations. This would not be a good thing, as private security companies, especially international ones, have a bad reputation among Afghans. Rimli and Schmeidl's research, confirmed by the author's own discussions with Afghans, found that

> Overall, PSCs are not seen in a positive light in Afghanistan. While PSCs may provide security for their clients, they are considered not to enhance the security of the general population. Much rather those interviewed suggested that the PSC presence leads to a sense of distrust or even insecurity. [161]

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PRTs a Model or a Muddle?" *Parameters*. <http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/05winter/mcnerney.htm>. ; Perito, R. (October 2005) "The U.S. Experience with Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan: Lessons Identified." *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*. <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr152.pdf>; Dziedzic, M. J. & Seidl, M. K. (September 2005) "Provincial Reconstruction Teams and Military Relations with International and Nongovernmental Organizations in Afghanistan." *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*. <http://www.usip.org/pubs/specialreports/sr147.html>; Christian Aid. (2004) *The Politics of Poverty: Aid in the New Cold War*. London, Christian Aid. <http://christianaid.org.uk/indepth/404caweek/index.htm>. pp. 40-51.

[156] Agence France Presse. (8 April 2007) "7 Die in Taliban Raid on Mine-Clearing Team." *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/08/world/asia/08afghan.html>.

[157] Sediq 2006.

[158] Carpenter 2006.

[159] See, for instance: Nawa 2006, pp. 17-20.

[160] Gannon 2006.

[161] Rimli, L. & Schmeidl, S. (November 2007) *Private Security Companies and Local Populations. An exploratory study of Afghanistan and Angola*. Bern, Switzerland, SwissPeace. <http://www.swisspeace.ch/typo3/fileadmin/user_upload/pdf/PSC.pdf>. p. 6.

The USAID demining coordinator, who, interestingly, is also the coordinator for security for USAID projects, told the author that even if the demining company does not have a private security arm, other private security companies will be involved in guarding the US reconstruction projects.[162] One Afghan NGO director has already had a bad experience with this type of arrangement. He explained that when the NGO was providing demining to support the reconstruction of the Kabul to Kandahar road, they were required to have an escort from an American private security contractor. He said that this "damaged us a lot because…the Taliban and the opposition thought that we are now with the Americans and with the military."

Finally, while the Afghan NGOs are more like UN contractors than traditional notions of 'civil society,' they have proven able to play an advocacy role – highlighting humanitarian issues and recommending policy. The Afghan NGOs together form the Afghan Campaign to Ban Landmines (ACBL), which has successfully pushed Afghanistan to sign the Mine Ban Treaty, and has raised some objections to the fact that the US is a non-signator.[163] Commercial companies, whose main motivation is profit, not humanitarianism, are far less likely to question US policy in Afghanistan and have much less organizational autonomy from the US government.[164] For instance when the author asked RONCO's president, Stephen Edelmann to comment on their programs in Afghanistan he said, "I suggest you talk to the State Department because I don't want to say something that might jeopardize the position of the company."[165] Likewise, DynCorp's mine action coordinator told the author, "State Department is paying DynCorp to represent them on the WRA [State Department Office for Weapons Removal and Abatement] project so our logo says WRA on it, our letterhead says WRA and we are listed here in country as WRA and we are accredited as WRA Afghanistan."[166]

### 8.1 Summary

There is a danger that the commercialization of demining is occurring in tandem with the securitization of US demining assistance. The greater involvement of private security companies and the linking of demining projects to US strategic objectives for Afghanistan could:

1) Draw priorities away from the people who need demining the most,
2) Damage the perception of neutrality that demining has enjoyed,
3) Marginalize NGOs involved in demining that have genuine criticisms of US policy, in favor of more deferential commercial contractors.

## *9. Conclusions and Recommendations*

Despite the complaints of weakness in the UNMACA-led demining system in Afghanistan, it has achieved a remarkable amount, considering the extremely difficult political and economic situations it has faced. By the end of 2005, local and international NGOs under the UN umbrella had cleared almost 156,000 mines and over 8.6 million

[162] Hutson 2006.
[163] Harpviken 2002, p. 940.
[164] cf. Johnson, C. & Leslie, J. (2005) *Afghanistan: The Mirage of Peace*. London, Zed Books. p. 106.
[165] Edelmann, S. (3 August 2006) Telephone conversation with author.
[166] Carpenter 2006.

UXO from over 1 billion square meters.[167] Because it was designed as a public service, it has largely tried to prioritize demining according to humanitarian and socio-economic need. The much needed reforms that have taken place since 2001 have increased the capacity of the UN-led program and made the structure more efficient and better targeted. Harpviken has called the Afghan demining program "a vital and inspiring force in [humanitarian mine action] internationally."[168]

Since 2005, the market for demining has undergone some deregulation, as commercial demining actors were accredited and allowed to compete for military and commercial reconstruction work (much of which is funded by government donors). By taking its money out of the UN-led program and moving to a commercial contracting model, USAID is particularly responsible for the growing commercialization of the demining sector, which is likely to expand in the coming years. This has the potential to enhance the capacity of Afghan demining, through greater profit-driven efficiency, innovation and specialization. Moreover, it is unlikely that many NGOs would be able, or willing, to do mine and UXO clearance tasks for the Coalition and Afghan militaries. Thus some involvement of commercial companies in Afghan demining should be welcomed.

However, the US-led commercialization of Afghan demining does raise some concerns. Firstly, the commercial drive to cut costs may actually decrease the quality and safety of the demining process. Indeed, the data suggesting this is much more reliable that the data suggesting the cost and productivity gains from commercial demining. Secondly, the commodification of demining has the potential to draw resources away from humanitarian demining, prioritizing those with money, rather than those in need. Finally, the commercialization process is occurring in tandem with US aid focusing on strategic security interests in the country. The marrying of security and reconstruction objectives, and the involvement of private security companies in demining projects may damage the UN-led program's long-cultivated perception of neutrality. The UN claims that through "thoroughly integrating" USAID into its planning and coordination efforts it is already tackling these problems. [169] However, ongoing vigilance is advised.

The fact that many government donors have decided to stick with the UN-led, NGO-implemented process is, in the author's opinion, a good thing, and has been encouraged by UNMACA reform. An ongoing and rigorous commitment to greater improvements in technical and management capacity, accountability, data collection and transparency within the UN-led process will bolster the attractiveness of funding it. As Chris Stephens of UNMACA noted, "change, internal and external, has led to an increase in donor confidence."[170]

Acknowledging that to a large degree commercialization is a *fait accompli*, the author has the following recommendations:

[167] UNMACA. (November 2006) IMSMA Database. Data queries on clearance area and devices. UXO figure includes fuses and cluster bomblets.
[168] Harpviken 2002, p. 940.
[169] Stephens 2007.
[170] Stephens 2007.

*To UNMACA:*

1. Build confidence in the UN-led system by addressing weaknesses in transparency and perceptions of unnecessary bureaucratic inertia.
2. Continue with organizational reform to improve donor reporting, transparency, better data collection and operational efficiency.
3. Commission a study into the economic, political and social impacts of the commercialization of demining in Afghanistan, and ways to make best use of the commercial potential.
4. Rapidly expand the capacity of the quality management structure of UNMACA and centralize the reporting from these teams in a headquarters database.
5. Improve the demining accident database and integrate this into IMSMA (Information Management System for Mine Action) properly.
6. Collate and analyze the quality management and accident data regularly and take accreditation away from organization that have consistently poor safety records.
7. Fundraise aggressively to maintain the humanitarian demining capacity at its current level.
8. Strengthen the NGO sector by encouraging transparency, building technical capacity and introducing elements of moderate competition for grants, so they are able to stem the hemorrhaging of talent to commercial companies.

*To the agencies of the US government:*

1. Maintain some funding for the UN-led system, conditional on improvements in transparency, efficiency and data reporting.
2. Support a UN-commissioned study into the economic, political and social impacts of the commercialization of demining in Afghanistan.
3. Ensure that reconstruction demining contractors are penalized for poor safety practices.
4. Strengthen the NGO sector by encouraging transparency, building technical capacity and introducing elements of moderate competition for grants, so they are able to stem the hemorrhaging of talent to commercial companies.
5. Give security clearance to more UNMACA quality management inspectors to observe the work of commercial contractors in Coalition secure areas.
6. Include tight caveat in commercials contracts emphasizing and ensuring the power of UNMACA is maintained. Ensure that contracts mandate submission of all clearance and accident data to them in a timely manner.
7. Be cautious about introducing commercialization into other demining programs in other countries.

*To other bilateral donors:*

1. Maintain and bolster funding for the UN-led demining system, conditional on improvements in transparency, operational efficiency and data reporting.
2. Support a UN-commissioned study into the economic, political and social impacts of the commercialization of demining in Afghanistan.
3. Include tight caveats in commercials contracts emphasizing and ensuring the power of UNMACA is maintained. Ensure that contracts mandate submission of all clearance and accident data to them in a timely manner.

4. Be cautious about introducing commercialization into other demining programs in other countries.

*To prime reconstruction contractors:*

1. Improve coordination with UNMACA, make sure they are fully aware of all demining and BAC contracts.
2. Include tight caveats in commercials contracts emphasizing and ensuring the power of UNMACA is maintained. Ensure that contracts mandate submission of all clearance and accident data to them in a timely manner.
3. Consider making client-provided private quality assurance inspection reports available in one central location (ideally UNMACA) so information on contractor performance is available to all clients.

*To commercial demining companies:*

1. Improve coordination with UNMACA, make sure they are fully aware of all demining and BAC operations, and submit all clearance and accident data to them in a timely manner.
2. Resist the temptation to cut corners in the SOPs, or to speed up the demining process beyond what is safe.
3. Consider the negative implications of using a private security capacity and having employees bearing arms, and the impact on the image of all demining agencies.
4. Go first to the pool of unemployed deminers for labor, rather than hiring talent away the Afghan NGOs. Consider setting payscales at an appropriate level, in consultation with UNMACA.

*To the Afghan NGOs:*

1. Build donor confidence by continuing to improve transparency, technical competence and management capacity.
2. Consider adopting some of the new technologies and innovations brought into the country by commercial operators.
3. Deal with the tough question of how the Afghan Demining Group's (ADG) profits will be distributed among the five NGOs and make a legal, written agreement.
4. Maintain close supervision over ADG to ensure it maintains the highest possible standards of clearance.

# *10. Annex: Profiles of Commercial Demining Companies Operating in Afghanistan*

## 10.1. International Companies

**ArmorGroup**: Formerly Defence Systems Limited (DSL), ArmorGroup is a private security company listed on the London Stock Exchange. On a contract with the UK Foreign Office, ArmorGroup provides security for all British government personnel and buildings in Afghanistan. It won the renewal of this contract, worth $38.5 million a year, in November 2006.[171] ArmorGroup also provides security and driving training for international organizations and Afghan security forces. 'Weapons Reduction and Mine Action' is one of ArmorGroup's core functions and it is one of the US State Department's three main worldwide contractors for such services.[172] At the time of the author's fieldwork, ArmorGroup was doing market research on whether to provide mine action services in Afghanistan. See:
http://www.armorgroup.com/services/servicesmineaction

**DynCorp International**: With roots in the civilian and military aviation sector, DynCorp has grown into a massive global company, based in Falls Church, Virgina, USA, providing additional services in infrastructure, security and logistics. In the last ten years, DynCorp has become a significant player in the private security market, fielding civilian peacekeepers in 11 countries, providing logistical support to the US military, guarding US diplomatic compounds and personnel and engaging in illicit drug eradication. In Afghanistan, DynCorp has run several high-profile private security operations including guarding President Hamid Karzai, opium poppy eradication, and training the Afghan police. As one of the State Department's three main worldwide contractors for mine action,[173] DynCorp holds its contract for Afghanistan, where DynCorp is building the capacity of the Afghan demining organizations, funding destruction of mine and small arms stockpiles and other mine action activities. See: http://www.dyn-intl.com/subpage.aspx?id=43

**EOD Technology, Inc.**: Founded in 1987, EODT is a military contractor which began providing munitions disposal services to US bases. It has recently seen rapid growth, 20-fold in the last five years, buoyed especially by private security contracts in Iraq. At the time of the author's fieldwork, EODT was conducting minefield and battle area clearance in the military area of Afghanistan's Kabul International Airport on a contract with the US Air Force.[174] See: http://www.eodt.com

[171] ArmorGroup (2007) "Redevelopment of Afghanistan." <http://www.armorgroup.com/globalreach/middleeast/case/middleeastcasestudies/>.
[172] US Department of State. (9 May 2005) "U.S. Department of State Awards Multiple Contracts to Clean Up Battlefields and Control Conventional Weapons." <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/45859.htm>.
[173] US Department of State 2005.
[174] EODT 2006.

**MineTech International**: Started in 1992 by Col. Lionel Dyck, who served in both the Rhodesian and Zimbabwean armed forces, MineTech is based in both the UK and Zimbabwe. Now owned by Exploration Logistics PLC, which provides logisitical, safety and medical support largely to the oil and gas industry. MineTech has cleared minefields in Mozambique, the Balkans, the Horn of Africa, Nicaragua, Lebanon and Iraq. Since 2004, MineTech, with around 100 staff in Afghanistan, has engaged in several clearance tasks on several military bases and for the International Organization for Migration[175] and provides explosive detection dogs to security firms. See: http://www.minetech.co.uk

**RONCO Consulting Corporation**: Founded as an international development consulting firm in 1974, RONCO found its primary raison d'etre while starting up USAID's early Afghan demining efforts in 1989. Since then it has been a dominant player in the commercial demining market with operations in over 30 countries. RONCO is currently the biggest mine action company in Afghanistan, having returned to the country in 2002. As one of the three main worldwide State Department demining contractors,[176] it held the State Department contract for building local capacity in Afghanistan until this was lost to DynCorp in August 2005. It has since cleared tasks for both military and commercial clients and had a revenue of about $5-6 million in 2006.[177] It was recently awarded a three year $16.4 million mine action contract from the Army Corps of Engineers.[178] RONCO also has a small, low-profile, private security operation in Afghanistan guarding several compounds and providing explosive detection dogs to other security companies.[179] See: http://www.roncoconsulting.com

**S3 AG**: Registered in Switzerland, S3, along with European Land Solutions (ELS) (formed out of MONTANEISEN GmbH and Greenfield Consultants Ltd) and Asian Land Solutions (ALS), is a member of Sefinor Group, whose constituent companies specialize in mine and UXO clearance and have operations in Bosnia, Kuwait, Iraq, the Russian Federation, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. In Afghanistan they have conducted clearance tasks for the US military and in the military area of Kabul International Airport. See: http://www.s3ag.ch or http://www.sefinor.com or http://www.land-solutions.com

**UXB International**: Founded in 1983 as the first US company specializing in munitions disposal, UXB has conducted mine action, explosive ordnance disposal and private security operations in 23 countries. In Afghanistan UXB has had several subcontracts with DynCorp, providing EOD support for poppy eradication efforts and technical advisors for the State Department capacity building grant. They have also conducted clearance operations in the military area of Kabul International Airport. See: http://www.uxb.com

[175] MineTech. (March 2006) "Landmine blight on Afghanistan's democratic landscape." <http://www.minetech.co.uk/downloads/Landmines-Afghanistan.pdf>.
[176] US Department of State 2005.
[177] Gannon 2006.
[178] U.S. Department of Defense 2007.
[179] Gannon 2006.

## 10.2. Afghan-Owned Companies

**Hemayatbrothers International Demining Company (HID)**: Started in May 2006 by Kefayatullah Eblagh, director of ATC, an Afghan demining NGO, HID was Afghanistan's first local demining company. Finally accredited by UNMACA in September 2006, it had completed six tasks in Kabul, Kunduz, Badakhshan and Herat provinces, on subcontracts to UXB. With a total of 100 staff, drawn largely from unemployed deminers trained in UNDP's demobilization program, it had two demining teams. See: http://www.hidcompany.com

**OMAR International**: Registered in Dubai, this is a commercial partner to the Afghan demining NGO of the same name. It has remained dormant for some time, but OMAR director, Fazel Fazel, spoke to the author about reviving it for commercial operations.

**Afghan Demining Group**: In its nascent stages during the author's fieldwork, this local company is owned by all five of the main Afghan demining NGOs, giving it access to a broad 'tool-box' of mine action specializations, including manual, mechanical and dog demining as well as a survey capacity.

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