

# **THE FIGHT AGAINST ANTIPERSONNEL MINES**



European commission

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It is available in French and English versions and may be ordered from Direction Générale VIII  
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## FOREWORD

*Peace restoration in countries which have gone through years of wartime comes within the context of a delicate period, some kind of «convalescence» which requires attention from the whole international community. Among the many problems to be faced, sometimes in a state of emergency, and always with a lack of financial means, the issue of antipersonnel mine clearance is the most complex. Antipersonnel mines outrageously prolong the state of war and delay the implementation of restoration and development programs should not only arise indignation but also mobilize all energies and initiatives. Mines, plus the totality of unexploded ammunitions which pollute former war sites, are indeed responsible for a new type of endemic situation affecting mainly children and found among the ten major causes of morbidity and mortality in Southern countries.*

*The fight against this plague supposes the implementation of a preventive strategy similar to the ones used to prevent, or eradicate, endemic diseases. It is actually a public health issue. The solution does not only consist in finding and neutralizing mines : there are others ways to protect the populations.*

*Destruction of mines, because there are so many of them, can by no means be an aim in itself. It is only a means of action which is part of a whole restoration program, except in cases of emergency where mine-clearance appears as an absolute necessity for the survival of a hemmed population or to permit the return of refugees*

*The European Commission has been financing mine clearing operations since 1992, in a pragmatic way, by responding to each direct solicitation from the affected States individually, to each grant request from specialized humanitarian associations and particularly by taking care of a great proportion of the national programs established by the United Nations Organization. These programs, prepared either for humanitarian purposes, or for the needs of the peace-keeping forces, are most of the time implemented by the U.N.O.*

*The respective delegates of the different Heads of the Commissions affected by the problem have soon realized the necessity to establish a doctrine and a strategy towards these actions, supported by European financing, so as to be conducted «by the book» and reach optimal results. Hence the need for a study aiming at the realization of a reference document to be used as a basis for co-operation actions of the European Union in this area.*

*The present handbook stems from this requirement and is an attempt to gather in a condensed form the whole information that all decision-making person should be aware of in terms of mine action ; to set up a univocal intervention strategy with regards to both the selection of projects and the modality of their implementation ; and finally to provide a bundle of documents to help with decisions allowing the E.U. to consistently get involved in specific programs and to dispose of the necessary means to permit their proper execution.*

*Therefore, while others are fighting for the absolute prohibition of the use of antipersonnel mines in the grounds of ethics and Human Rights, the Commission commits itself with determination to the fight against the worst aftermath of war. The ones that kill or disable the individuals at a time when they believe they can finally leave in peace, in newly-restored security, and enjoy their part of happiness.*

*Michel Joli*

# Introduction

The first devices designed so as to explode on target-contact were water mines. The first references to land mines (called at the time «torpedoes», by analogy with their precursors) date back to the Battle of Williamsburg in 1862, an episode of the **American Civil War**. General Rains, who was guarding the rear of the retreating Confederate army, adapted shells so as to surprise the Union vanguard. Even at this early date, the first use of mines raised strong feelings- including in the Southern military command, where the procedure was judged to be **unworthy and «improper» to the conduct of warfare**.

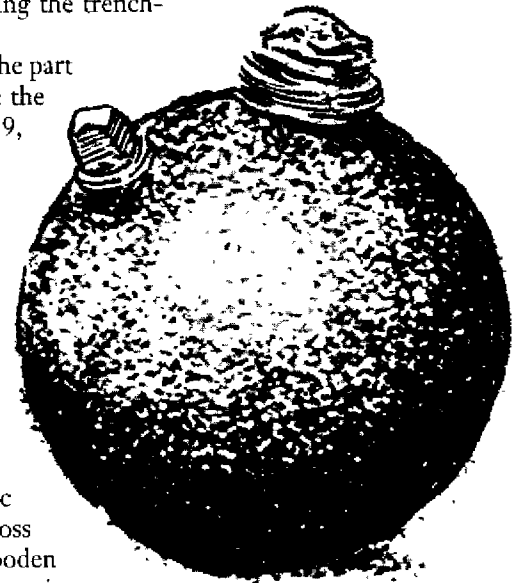
Mines were later to be sown around Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War of 1905; the use of such weapons, however, remained exceptional, including during the trench-warfare of the 1914-18 War.

Mines only begin to appear on a large scale in 1918, as an answer on the part of the German military artificers to another new piece of weaponry: the British and French assault tanks. Mines were put to wide use as of 1939, principally as an **antitank device**.

However, in order to hinder the work of deactivating the antitank mines, anti-mine-clearer- i.e., **antipersonnel-mines** were sown along with the others. Henceforward, most of the mines to be produced would be designed for such antipersonnel deployment. Particularly large minefields were sown on the Libyan Front (500,000 British mines at Tobruk, and 500,000 German ones at El Alamein), on the Eastern Front, where the Red Army probably laid some 222 million mines, and in Normandy, where General Rommel laid between 5 and 7 million (although he estimated that not less than 50 million would be necessary to defend the Atlantic Wall). It was in Lorraine that the American soldiers first came across non-metal mines, towards the end of 1944. 12,000 bakelite and wooden mines in a single minefield. In 1945, U S. Army statistics recorded that mines were responsible for 2.5% of casualties dead in combat and for 20.7% of tank losses. Since the 2nd World War, the proliferation (production, sale and deployment) of mines has, in the course of the all-too-many regional conflicts, run altogether out of control. In this kind of «**low-intensity» warfare**, in which armoured vehicles play a relatively secondary role, antipersonnel mines come to feature independently of their antitank forbears. Antipersonnel mines, first employed as an «artillery substitute» against enemy bands and armies (in 1970, 50% of Portuguese casualties in Angola could be attributed to mine use)- are now being used against civilian populations.

Since 1939, the face of the earth has been strewn with more than 400 million mines, of which 65 million have been laid since 1978.

The American Department of State, in a December 1994 report («Hidden Killers: The Global Landmine Crisis») estimated the total number of active mines laid on the surface of the planet to be between **65 and 110 millions**. Those can be found in 62 countries, with the highest concentration in Africa where 20 million active mines are scattered among half the countries of the continent. They are responsible for the death of 12000 people each year, and twice as many injured. Angola, Afghanistan and Cambodia are among the most extensively mined. They have a total of 28 million mines, and up to 22000 accidents causing serious injuries are recorded each year. In Angola, 52000 Km of roads are presently mined. Countries «infested» by over one million mines are Mozambique, Iran, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Erthrea. Ex-Yugoslavia also fits into this category. Figures from the International Red Cross Committee about Zimbabwe speak for themselves: an over-one-million-acre area has been deserted by the population due to the presence of mines. Stocks of ready-to-use mines



1862

are approximately as numerous, and an estimated 2 million mines are laid each year.

Necessary as it might be, the fight against antipersonnel mines appeared only recently as a necessity to the international community. Such an awareness stems from two striking happenings in 1989 and 1990:

— The collapse of the communist system, as well as major events such as the abolition of Apartheid in South Africa brought an end to political and financial support to many warring countries and forced them to lay down arms. Such was the case of Afghanistan, Mozambique, Angola, Cambodia, Central America, etc... This evolution permitted a number of humanitarian and peace-restoration operations, among which mine-clearance.

— The Gulf War left behind a number of unexploded mines and ammunitions on the Kuwaiti territory. The conjunction of a strong military presence and great financial means permitted the development of wide scale mine-clearing operations. Those created new market perspectives for existing companies and gave birth to new companies and specialized Non-Governmental Organizations (ONG).

In the early 90's, the largest humanitarian donors (UNO, European Union, Organization of the American States, etc...) facing the issue of mines in many countries on their way back to peace, resolved to get involved in programs to guarantee the continuation of these activities. The World Bank itself tends to well-disposed to participate in the fight against mines.

The links between humanitarian mine-clearance and the military are strong, indeed even structural. In fact, no civilian profession provides any experience with mine-clearance, and **military deminers**, detached or young retired people from the Army, represent the only source of manpower. The tendency of these experts is to implement techniques practised by the armies in their home countries and in external theatres of operations (Africa, the Falklands, Kuwait...). As a consequence, «humanitarian» mine-clearance was placed from the beginning under the supervision of military mine clearers. Humanitarian mine-clearance permitted the destruction of 84000 mines in 1994 for a cost of approximately \$70 millions. The individual identification and destruction cost for one mine can therefore easily be calculated and it amounts to approximately \$850.

However, minute examination of these figures lead to a **negative acknowledgement**: Peace-time mine clearing operations resulted in a decrease in the growth rate of mines on the Earth by **1/34**. Since this ratio is obviously less than the margin of error in our basic data, particularly the number of mines that have been laid, it can be inferred that this outcome is quantitatively **negligible**. Such a lack of result - «failure» would be an inappropriate word - can be explained by the broadness and the geographical expanse of the problem as well as the inappropriate means deployed

To the importance of these **quantitative data**, one should oppose the **qualitative aspect** of mine-clearance, which allows to definitively treat particularly sensitive areas. All mines are not equal in terms of the threat they represent for humans and some of them must absolutely be removed.

However the overall assessment we can make today, after an almost ten-year experience, does not leave any room for optimism. To use a military image, when a column is facing a minefield, it will preferably dodge the obstacle than run into dangerous and tedious mine-clearing operations of the zone. Similarly, the delegate of a program of action, be he in charge of rescue operations, peace-restoration missions or rehabilitation and development, will sometimes be brought to «dodge the obstacle» for lack of financial means keeping him from performing a thorough mine-clearance, or at least to make choices in terms of priorities. This supposes that he had effective, less costly and less dangerous alternatives available.

The ambition of this handbook is to sum up the present situation of mine action and suggest orientations for the future. It sums up the information that all decision-makers should know about:

- the problem of mines in general
- the means available to the international community to fight against this plague
- the implementation of these means in the field
- the legal and financial conditions for the completion of programs to fight against antipersonnel mines.

**This document is the first in its category.**

It results from the compiling of many publications (see Page ...) that we cannot all name in here; most of them stem from international institutions. It is mainly the result of collective thinking and conversations that the authors have had in Belgium, in Great Britain, in the United States and in France with the best specialists in the area, as much on a technical as well as administrative and legal levels.

There might be some errors in the figures and facts, as there are sometimes so many discrepancies in the information gathered. This does not alter, however, the methodological approach, and, particularly, the aim of the European Commission : **to turn the fight against antipersonnel mines, in all its various forms, into a measure to go along with emergency rehabilitation and development programs.**

