

Matthew B. Bolton

Foreign aid and landmine clearance: governance, politics and security in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Sudan

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Governance, Politics and
Security in Afghanistan,
Bosnia and Sudan

MATTHEW BOLTON



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INTRODUCTION

*'We need to shift more attention from
government to governance.'*

– William W. Boyer¹

No one should have to feel their next step might be their last. Yet over 5,000 people a year fall victim to landmines and unexploded shells lying scattered across the world's current and former war zones.² Landmines know no ideology, no ethnicity; they know no difference between soldier and civilian; they do not respect peace agreements and can kill six decades or more after former enemies have shaken hands and laid aside their weapons. Responding to this security threat, international donors, NGOs and commercial companies have developed a new aid sector called 'mine action,' mitigating the impact of landmines and UXO through clearance, education, survivor assistance, stockpile destruction and political advocacy.³ Since the signing of the Antipersonnel Mine Ban Treaty in 1997, governments have spent over \$3 billion on mine action, which is now considered a major component of international post-conflict reconstruction efforts, contributing to the creation of a secure environment, assisting in refugee return, opening access to roads for commerce and aid, rehabilitating agricultural land and providing employment for demobilized soldiers. This book focuses in particular on foreign aid programs funding the clearance of landmines and UXO.

In his Oscar-winning existential drama, *No Man's Land*, set in the Bosnian war,⁴ director Danis Tanovic depicted two opposing soldiers, trapped in a trench together. They are surrounded by minefields and threatened by a third soldier, who has woken up to find himself lying on top of a landmine. If he moves, all three of them will be killed. Into the mix, Tanovic throws Sgt. Marchand, a French soldier with the UN peacekeeping force, whose moral outrage at the war motivates him to

try to save the three stranded soldiers. Though Marchand tries singlehandedly to create a moral space in the normlessness of no man's land, by the end of the film, the results of his efforts are ambiguous at best. He is stymied by an uncaring and incompetent UN bureaucracy, pestered by a fickle and sensationalist news media and confronted by the ungrateful and mutually hostile beneficiaries of his efforts. Ultimately his labors seem for naught, crushed and poisoned by the overwhelming power of the system of conflict in which he is trapped. Sgt. Marchand's dilemma is but a small indication of what has been a brutal reality of modern warfare. Long after guns fall silent, landmines, cluster bombs and unspent shells block access to farmland, prevent refugee return and maintain a constant psycho-social reminder of the violence of war.

As Sgt. Marchand's seemingly futile efforts dramatized, removing and neutralizing such dangerous devices as landmines is no easy task. Like Sgt. Marchand, deminers operate in regions where no single entity is clearly in charge. To gain access to minefields, obtain important information about patterns of mining, hire a workforce or purchase supplies, demining agencies must negotiate between a myriad of powerful actors: military factions, international organizations, shadowy underworld structures, local political machines, foreign embassies and aid providers. Many competing motivations, interests and conceptions of security are constantly interacting, competing and collaborating with each other and impacting the manner in which mine clearance work is done. Demining is not simply a technical matter, it is also political one, for mines and unexploded ordnance pose a violent threat of bodily harm – even death – to people in their vicinity. Demining is thus ultimately an act of governance – the removal of a violent threat to life. Who controls this power to defuse such a threat is a political question. Political and economic interests and the manner in which states, individuals and other powerful entities conceive security all influence the way in which mine action is organized and implemented.

Thus, while this book is about the political economy of foreign aid programs that clear landmines and other explosive remnants of war, it is ultimately about the ways in which institutions deal with the problem of security – the management, reduction, mitigation or elimination of risk, particularly the risk of violent harm. Observing demining programs allows one to study how norms, interests and the multiple shifting layers of governance can shape foreign aid and security provision in a post-conflict zone. This book contributes to the literatures on security, governance and the political economy of aid in conflict. Unlike more established foreign aid sectors, like health, food aid or community development, there is not a long pedigree of academic research into mine action. Research on demining from a social scientific, rather than a technocratic or campaigning point of view, is in its nascent stages. Part of the purpose of this study is to address this gap by exploring how the politics of the demining can be understood through the lens of social science, primarily political science. This book will draw on and contribute to academic debates on post-statist governance, realism versus idealism, peace and

security, privatization and contracting, the political economy of war, and foreign aid.

Landmines, UXO and Demining

Landmines are explosive traps – devices that through mechanical, electrical or chemical fuzes are detonated when initiated by their victim. Once laid, they wait until either they claim a victim or are cleared by deminers. Military forces have generally used mines for defensive purposes, multiplying the impact of their forces by protecting a strategically important location or ‘shaping terrain’ by channeling enemy forces in certain directions. However, they have also been used offensively, particularly by irregular and guerilla forces, to ambush vehicles, intimidate civilians and penetrate into areas where it would be impossible to leave troops for an extended period of time.

Mines come in a variety of forms. Antipersonnel landmines are small, detonated with only a few kilograms of pressure and intended to harm individual people. They are usually designed to injure rather than kill, aiming to distract enemy resources away from fighting and towards caring for the casualty. Antipersonnel mines can cause horrific injuries. The blast can blow off a foot or hand, force dirt and debris far into the wound (causing terrible infections) and generate shockwaves in the flesh that damage other parts of the body. Fragmentation mines are a kind of antipersonnel mine intended to injure or kill other people in addition to the victims who encounter them, by spraying shrapnel or ball bearings. They are often placed above the ground on a stake, to maximize the radius of damage. Bouncing fragmentation mines, like the WWII-era ‘Bouncing Betties’ or the Yugoslav PROM-1, have an initial detonation that lifts them into the air, before a second explosion spews fragments over 100 meters away. Directional fragmentation mines, like the US Claymore mine, spray shrapnel in a specific, predetermined direction. They are often connected to trip wires to increase the chances of detonation. Antivehicle mines, sometimes referred to as antitank mines, contain considerably more explosive material than antipersonnel mines, take more pressure to detonate and are intended to disable or destroy vehicles. They are often laid on roads to ambush convoys or prevent military traffic. If a human is unfortunate enough to initiate an antivehicle mine, it usually kills them. Some technologically sophisticated mines have the option of being ‘command-detonated’ by a person who lies in wait, using a fuse, switch or remote control. Such techniques have become common with the use of ‘Improvised Explosive Devices’ (IEDs) – homemade mines – in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Local factions in these conflicts have innovated methods of using mobile phones and walkie-talkies to remotely detonate roadside bombs. As mass-produced mines have become stigmatized in the international arena, irregular forces have increasingly turned to improvising their own devices.

Mines can be laid by hand, distributed by vehicle or scattered from the air. Regular armies, particularly when laying defensive minefields, have tended to lay mines in regular patterns, both to ensure the efficient coverage of an area, and facilitate clearance by their own troops (who know the patterns). Of course, when scattering mines from aircraft, no such precision is possible. Irregular forces have tended to use mines in a less 'linear' fashion, partly because of their lack of training, but also because they are more likely to use mines as an offensive weapon – placed in the path of military convoy or on the doorstep of 'unwanted' civilian populations.

Victim-activated landmines first emerged during the US Civil War, but came into their own as a weapon in the WWII desert tank battles in North Africa. During the Vietnam War, the US innovated methods for scattering thousands of mines from the air, techniques which were mirrored by the USSR during its war in Afghanistan. In both Vietnam and Afghanistan, local resistance fighters developed methods of using mines as offensive weapons of ambush, which were also seen in the African wars of decolonization. The 1980s and early 1990s saw unprecedentedly widespread use of mines in the Reagan-era proxy conflicts and post-Cold War 'New Wars.' This created a crisis of contamination that prompted the campaign to ban landmines, culminating in the Ottawa Convention, a total ban on the stockpiling, trade, transfer and use of antipersonnel landmines in 1997.⁵

In contaminating the land of conflict zones, mines are joined by the 30% of modern munitions that fail to detonate upon impact with their targets, leaving highly unstable explosives in the ground decades into the future. Such UXO, while sometimes easier to clear than landmines, create *de facto* minefields – as they can detonate when disturbed, tampered with or touched.⁶ Cluster munitions, small bomblets that disperse over a wide area from a single bomb or rocket, are particularly prone to becoming UXO and, as a result, have also been banned by the around 100 countries that signed the Convention on Cluster Munitions in 2008.⁷

Over 75 countries are impacted by mines and UXO. A reliable quantification of contamination levels around the world is not available. However, in 2007, demining agencies cleared some 534 square kilometers of mine and UXO-contaminated land and the *Landmine Monitor* publication estimated that 'thousands' of square kilometers remained.⁸ There were at least 5,426 casualties of mines and UXO (1,401 killed, 3,939 injured and 86 whose status was unknown) in 2007. Just three countries – Afghanistan, Cambodia and Colombia – accounted for 38% of the casualties.⁹

Methods of clearing landmines and UXO have changed surprisingly little since their initial development during and after WWII. The development of 'humanitarian demining' in the 1990s has made changes in the process and standards but few major differences in techniques. Humanitarian demining has different purposes and standards to military demining, also called 'counter-mining.' When faced with an enemy minefield in the heat of battle, the top priority of a military commander is to get through it as quickly as possible while minimizing

casualties. In the aftermath of conflict, such emphasis on speed over safety is not acceptable when returning land to civilian use. Recognizing the need for higher standards of safety, the various nonprofits organizations, UN agencies and commercial companies that developed 'humanitarian demining' have emphasized the need for checking and clearing every square meter of suspected hazardous area and attempting to achieve near 100% clearance.

The popular media has a tendency to fixate on high-tech and bizarre demining innovations – everything from rats, bees and remote-control robots to air-balloons, radars and genetically modified mustard seeds. However, given that importing sensitive, high-tech machines and organisms into mine-affected countries is often prohibitively expensive, there are few 'quick fixes' to the world's mine problem. The vast majority of demining programs use a combination of relatively technologically simple techniques. The most common is a human deminer, armed only with a prodder and/or trowel, slowly prodding and excavating the ground along a predetermined 'lane', carefully ensuring that s/he approaches mines from an angle that will not detonate them. When s/he comes upon a mine, it is either removed, defused or destroyed *in-situ*. When deminers know that the mines used in a particular area have metal parts, and the surrounding earth is not too metallic, they may also use metal detectors to facilitate their work. Working in combination, along lanes well-spaced from each other, the deminers eventually check every single square meter of the minefield. Demining agencies also often train dogs to sniff out and locate explosives, though within the sector there is some debate about how best to use them. The dogs are rarely heavy enough to initiate mines and so can sit on or near the mine to show their handler where to excavate. Inventors have developed a variety of machines to assist in the demining process, clearing vegetation, flailing the ground to explode mines or using radar to aid detection. But, as yet, no machines have been able to match the accuracy and care of a good human deminer and so mechanical clearance methods are usually combined with other techniques.¹⁰

Demining and Governance Complexes

After WWII, millions of mines and tonnes of UXO contaminated continental Europe. Just as the European states had mobilized massive resources to prosecute the war, the post-war mine and UXO clearance effort was government-led and funded. Like the war, post-WWII demining was very much a nation state and military affair. In contrast, today's demining programs mirror the new forms of globalized public-private partnerships arising to deal with the rise of transnational sources of insecurity in the conflicted 'frontiers' of the international system. For example, while Bosnia does have its own military clearance program, much of its capital Sarajevo was demined by an international charity, largely funded by the Norwegian government. Likewise, in Afghanistan, the US has contracted private

security companies to clear NATO military bases. Demining, like many other government services, has become globalized and privatized.

Mine clearance programs no longer mirror the Weberian hierarchical and bureaucratic structures of command and control of WWII European armies. They are made up of a myriad of competing, colluding and collaborating entities, including international and local nonprofit organizations, commercial companies, bilateral donors, local government authorities, UN agencies and military alliances. Demining programs echo security and development scholar Mark Duffield's description of 'strategic networks and complexes' that have replaced the traditional idea of 'security through government' with security through 'polyarchical, non-territorial and networked relations of governance.'¹¹ Duffield has a tendency to conflate all these complexes into one 'emerging system of global liberal governance.'¹² However, this book will show that there are multiple types of the networks that can operate in very different ways. The differing constituent members and institutional structures of a network shape the approach it takes to mines and UXO. Different ways of organizing networks produce different outcomes, both in terms of demining performance and the impact on the peacebuilding and reconstruction process. While there is some overlap, these 'demining complexes' can be divided into at least two broad ideal types (or perhaps two poles on a continuum):

1. **Strategic-Commercial Complexes** are shaped largely by the interests of a privileged few, in which militarized and securitized public bodies, often of the great powers, contract out significant authority to commercial companies. Within the mine action field, one finds that great power states try to limit the regulation of mines and other weapons and contract out clearance through private security companies, prioritizing military or strategic objectives. Such networks tend to produce a low cost and rapid demining process but sacrifice quality and safety. They are also more likely to compromise with the political economy of conflict and contribute to the privatization of the use of force.
2. **Human Security-Civil Society Complexes** are shaped by humanitarian norms and a more global understanding of interest, in which middle power states and multilateral agencies form partnerships with NGOs and social movements. They aim to provide protection to the general population, especially the vulnerable, through aid, advocacy, persuasion and the legal process. Within the mine action field, one finds that middle power states, in coalition with NGOs and social movements, try to heavily regulate the use of mines and prioritize humanitarian need in clearance programs. Their demining programs are often slower and more costly, but value high levels of quality and safety. They are also often

more inclusive organizations, trying to build local capacity and advocate for limits on the politics of violence.

This book will show the development, nature, organization and effects of the above two approaches in managing the threat of landmines and unexploded ordnance in conflict zones. To do this it will look at two case studies of donor countries – the US and Norway – and observe their funding of demining programs in three mine and UXO-affected countries: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina (hereafter, Bosnia) and Sudan.

Case Studies

The USA and Norway were selected as donor country case studies because they were the top two bilateral donors in absolute terms (though Norway gives more relative to its GDP). Additional characteristics that make them attractive for comparison include the fact that they are both wealthy industrial democracies that won independence from colonization, and both have significant histories of foreign aid provision. The differences in their mine action policies reflect the findings of Jan Egeland in his 1988 comparison of US and Norwegian human rights policy.¹³ Egeland found that as a superpower, US foreign policy was constricted by numerous strategic and commercial interests that hijacked its ability to shape policies according to humanistic ideals. By contrast, Norway had fewer transnational interests and more space to pursue a normative foreign policy.

Similarly, the US has resisted tight regulation of mines, cluster munitions and other explosive remnants of war. The macro structure of US funding of clearance and mitigation of explosive remnants of war was shaped largely by its strategic interests and favored a commercially-driven process. In contrast, working with NGOs, churches and other small states, Norway has been at the forefront of efforts to ban landmines and cluster munitions. Its mine action programs, implemented through international NGOs, were shaped by a more global conception of interest and normative commitments to humanitarianism, multilateralism and international law.

At the level of implementation in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Sudan, Norwegian long-term grants to international NGOs produced demining that, while sometimes more expensive and slower, was better targeted at humanitarian priorities, safer and of better quality. Such programs also attempted to build inclusive institutions and resist the politics of violence. In contrast, US efforts, shaped by strategic concerns and often tendered out to commercial companies, were frequently cheaper and faster but also less safe and of lower quality. These companies were also embedded in the political economy of war and may have contributed to the fragmentation of the public monopoly on force.

The three implementation countries – Afghanistan, Bosnia and Sudan – were chosen carefully to try to avoid case selection bias, while ensuring that the cases

would have enough material to make for an interesting study. The countries had to have large mine action programs and be among the top recipients of US and Norwegian mine action funding (to ensure there would be enough activities to study and that the donor would have a coherent funding policy). To guarantee some variation between them and see if similar trends could be spotted in diverse circumstances, they had to be located in very different regions, with different political contexts, economic situations, climate and soil conditions (important in demining performance). To facilitate historical comparisons, the countries selected had mine action programs that started in different time periods (Afghanistan is among the oldest programs, Sudan among the newest). Finally, a variety of logistical and security constraints ruled out a variety of cases (like Angola, Iraq and Lebanon) that would have satisfied the above criteria.

Afghanistan was chosen as a case study because it is one of the oldest and largest mine action programs and has one of the highest levels of mine and UXO contamination in the world. Researching Afghan mine action enabled the exploration of the genesis of the sector and tracing the roots of trends that appeared in other countries. Afghanistan also offered potential for tracing the varying impact of humanitarian strategic interest. Afghan demining began at the end of the Cold War, in the context of the massive humanitarian and covert efforts in the Soviet-Afghan War. Three different models of demining emerged at that time: a) commercialized and securitized demining in support of US-backed paramilitary efforts, b) international NGO demining claiming humanitarian neutrality and c) UN coordinated mine action, implemented by local NGOs and also claiming neutrality. As Afghanistan dropped off the global radar from 1992 to 2001, the UN-led model was ascendant and was supported by both the US and Norway. However, US re-engagement in Afghan politics after 9/11 saw it return to a 'securitized' and commercialized model of demining. In contrast, objecting to the massive top-heavy growth of the UN program, Norway switched to funding an Afghan-led international NGO, the HALO Trust, in order to support an Afghan-led civil-society actor espousing traditional humanitarian values.

Following the 1995 endgame of Bosnia's war, the frontlines dividing Bosnian Government territory from its separatist statelets – the 'Republika Srpska', 'Herzeg-Bosna' and the 'Bihac pocket' – were littered with extremely high levels of mine and UXO contamination. Bosnia makes a good case study because it has a very diverse mine action sector, with many different actors, allowing for some interesting intra-country comparisons. It is also a 'middle-aged' mine action program, its genesis lying in growing trends of international intervention in the 1990s rather than the Cold War roots of the Afghan program. Finally, like Afghanistan, Bosnia has been of variable strategic importance over time. From 1996 to 2000, Bosnia received considerable international attention and significant numbers of US and Norwegian troops deployed as part of the NATO stabilization mission. However, since then, especially after 9/11 when attention shifted to Afghanistan and Iraq, the US and Norway have reduced their involvement in

Bosnia. US support of Bosnian demining took two forms: a) support to the local militaries, as part of a larger effort to transform them from a threat to European security into future NATO members, and b) a commercial tendering system that for several years was captured by a criminalized ethno-nationalist elite. This may have functioned as part of a broader US 'passive policy' toward such elites, aimed at getting their buy-in to the peace and reconstruction process. In contrast, while Norway gave some token assistance to military deminers, the vast majority of its assistance was channeled through an international NGO, Norwegian People's Aid (NPA), that employed a multiethnic staff and supported efforts to build a cosmopolitan polity in Bosnia.

At war since 1983, Sudan has an as yet undefined landmine and UXO contamination problem, caused largely by fighting between the Northern government and Southern rebels. Sudan was primarily chosen to act as a potential 'spoiler case.' Following field research in Afghanistan and Bosnia, the author felt it was necessary to look at a third case that would challenge and test the predictive powers of his tentative hypotheses. Because the demining program in Sudan is quite new, beginning in earnest only in 2004, there has been little written about it. Sudan also differed from the other two cases in terms of strategic interest. While both Norway and the US have paid significant attention to the situation in Sudan, neither have found it of enough importance to make major commitments of troops to the country. For all these reasons, the Sudan case had the potential to prove the author's ideas wrong, or at least force them to become more sophisticated. US support for demining between the 2002 Nuba Mountains ceasefire and the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) followed the commercialized and securitized patterns seen in Afghanistan and Bosnia. In 2007, a USAID demining contract continued in this vein. However, following the CPA, the US State Department concentrated on funding international NGOs and local government capacity building. Indeed, its funding of the Scandinavian NGOs Norwegian People's Aid and DanChurchAid (DCA) overlapped with Norway's choice of implementing partners. This contrasted with the UN model of commercializing and integrating mine action into the politico-military objectives of the UN peacekeeping mission, which actually resembled the US strategic-commercial approach in Afghanistan and Bosnia. This shows that the impulse to control and securitize the process when there are more interests at stake may not be limited to the US. When strategic interest is lower, donors seem more willing to grant their demining funding to NGOs. This reflects a tendency among Western countries to frame conflicts of low strategic importance as zones for 'humanitarian' rather than politico-military intervention.

A Brief Note on Methodology

This project would be impossible without immersion into mine-affected countries, the offices of mine action agencies and visits to the actual minefields themselves. Therefore, while an anthropologist would never allow this to be called an ethnography (as the author's immersion in each of the case study countries was not lengthy enough and the focus of study was political economy rather than culture) the author tried to use ethnographic techniques such as participant-observation, interviewing key informants and 'thick description'.¹⁴ The author thus uses the "loose definition" of ethnography, described by political scientists Lorraine Bayard de Volo and Edward Schatz as 'those methods that seek to uncover emic (insider) perspectives on political and social life and/or ground-level processes....'¹⁵ Diverging from traditional ethnography, the data gathered is placed into the framework of comparative politics – comparing across places and times to seek potentially generalizable information and trends. Rather than seeing 'the field' in the traditional sense of a bounded *geographic* area, the field of study was conceived of as the bounded *sector* of mine action in a variety of locations. The point was less to learn the culture and politics of a particular place, but rather to be immersed in the culture and politics of the demining sector generally.¹⁶ Therefore, this book aims to trace the politics of mine action from the top to the bottom, from the global level to the level of bilateral donors, and on down to the level of implementation. This approach to defining the field is necessary in a time of globalization, where few phenomena can be easily bounded to a particular location. Therefore, unlike traditional field research, this required a global methodology; the author's research took him to London, Washington DC, New York, Geneva, Oslo, Kabul, Sarajevo, Juba and Khartoum.

Overview

Chapter One gives a historical overview of the global politics of mine action, illustrating the ways in which relations in the international arena have shaped the response to the problems of mine and UXO contamination. After a description of post-WWII state-centric demining efforts, it traces the development of alternative models of mine action, through the Indochinese Wars to contemporary 'New' and 'Post-Modern' Wars.

Chapter Two, though not specifically focused on mine action, lays the theoretical foundations of this study, creating a typology of responses to insecurity, since the threat of mines and explosive remnants of war is essentially a threat of physical violence. It shows that traditional state-centric responses – realist 'National Security' and idealist 'Collective Security' – are no longer appropriate in responding to 'New Wars' and other transnational threats. In their place, two new forms of 'post-statist' networked governance, comprising both public and private

actors, have arisen: Strategic-Commercial Complexes and Human Security-Civil Society Complexes. The rest of the book uses this typology as its theoretical framework, with which to understand and compare different ways of structuring mine action programs and the implications for the outcome of mine clearance as an element of post war reconstruction. It traces the development, operation and impact of these two models in the mine action sector, from the macro-level of global politics down to the micro-level of implementation in affected countries.

Taking a closer look at the internal workings of these complexes, Chapter Three argues that the mine action policies of the US and Norway can be useful as rough proxies for comparing the Strategic-Commercial and Human Security-Civil Society approaches to mine action. Borrowing Jan Egeland's argument that the US is more constrained by strategic and commercial interest than Norway, the chapter shows that the US has, with only a few exceptions, consistently tried to block tight regulations on mines and cluster munitions, while Norway has championed them. Likewise, US aid for demining is influenced heavily by military and security concerns and much of it is contracted out to commercial companies. In contrast, Norwegian demining aid is rooted in humanitarian concerns and is largely implemented by international NGOs.

The next three chapters focus down on implementation in three mine and UXO affected countries: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Sudan. Chapter Four provides background on demining efforts in each country, focusing on US and Norwegian supported programs. It then shows that, in general, when a donor's strategic and commercial interests were higher, they tended to opt for a commercial tendering model. When they had less strategic interests at stake, they were able to act in a more humanitarian fashion and give long-term grants to international NGOs. The performance of these two models of funding – commercial tendering and grants to NGOs – is then compared in Chapter Five. Basic statistical analysis shows that while it tends to be slower and more expensive, the granting model tends to concentrate on more difficult demining tasks and conduct the process to a higher standard of quality and safety. Chapter Six then looks at the wider impact of the two 'Demining Complexes' on the broader socio-political context of transition from war to peace. It finds that while implementing agencies operating in a Strategic-Commercial mode may contribute to strengthening state security organs, they are also more likely to strengthen the fragmentation and privatization of security. In contrast, the Human Security-Civil Society Complex's greater freedom from the constraints of expediency enables it to resist the politics of violence, advocate for limits on the technologies of war and set up systems that distribute protection according to need. The book concludes by offering a summary of key findings, policy recommendations for the mine action sector and, in closing, final reflections on security in a post-statist world.

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