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# **United Nations Overview of the Improvised Explosive Device Situation and Reflections of a Coherent Response.**

*Agnès Marcaillou, Director, United Nations Mine Action Service*



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The United Nations is operating in increasingly violent environments often where there is no formal peace agreement or even peace to keep. The nature of conflict is evolving in ways that affect the ability of the United Nations to deliver efficiently on its peace, security and humanitarian mandates, at a time when the UN Secretary General and the Head of the Department for Peacekeeping Operations have stressed the importance of the “protection of civilians” in UN mandates<sup>1</sup>.

The Armed Groups around the world have access to a wide range of weapons, no longer limited to cheap –albeit effective- weapons, as they are now commonly affiliated to national, regional and global trafficking networks, financiers and bomb makers. They have their own research and development capabilities and mobile training teams that pass on ‘lessons learnt’. They have been quick to exploit the power of social media and can spin larger political or ideological narratives into local grievances. Added to this there is synergy between transnational organized crime and terrorism increasing the complexity of the problem.

The traditional boundaries within the spectrum of conflict are becoming increasingly blurred and we can expect to see the use of asymmetric tactics as a future character of conflict. Asymmetric tactics have evolved to enable global and regional spoilers the ability to offset the advantage in technology that is enjoyed by advanced military forces.

The use of IEDs is not a new phenomenon in asymmetric conflict. However, these weapons are having an unprecedented impact on the United Nations. Their impact is human, financial and political: IEDs seriously harm and claim the lives of too many civilians and UN personnel; increase the cost of delivering “peace”, and hamper stabilization, extension of state authority, whilst potentially affecting the credibility of UN mandates and authority.

By preventing peacekeepers from fulfilling tasks mandated by the Security Council, IEDs seriously undermine the political objectives and the operational effectiveness of United Nations interventions. For example, to deliver a political, mediation or otherwise advisory mandate, personnel have to move safely, cost effectively and in timely fashion, to meet and engage with leaders and communities, something that IEDs can greatly affect. IEDs also impact on political processes when they are used to ascertain power, claim territorial control, distract attention, and target individuals and institutions – including the UN.

In targeting humanitarian workers, the use of IEDs affects the delivery of humanitarian and food assistance, the safe return of refugees and displaced populations as well as the socio-

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<sup>11</sup> *The views expressed by the author do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations*

economic recovery of affected nations. IED's that remain undetonated in urban or rural terrain deny access to vital infrastructure, and hinder reconstruction efforts. <sup>i</sup>

They prevent affected countries from emerging from conflict, make difficult extension of state authority and stabilization efforts, hinder regions in resisting against destabilisation, and globally hamper the fight against the expansion of transnational organised crime and its increasing association with terrorist networks.

### The UN response

The United Nations is increasingly proactive and structured in organizing a coherent response to this threat, not only to deliver its mandates effectively but also because the Organization has made the safety and security of its personnel, uniformed and civilians alike, a priority.

Addressing the use of IEDs and their associated impacts requires a coordinated United Nations, whole-of-system, approach. The response to IED use over the past decade and a half has been primarily military oriented. Most recently, a number of initiatives have been undertaken to improve the coherence of the UN approach and the effectiveness of its response in the context of peace operations, initiatives and measures which are also to be applied to civilian personnel deployed in non-mission settings where a potential IED threat may arise.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) provided an official mandate on IEDs to the Monitoring Team of the Council's 1267 Committee against Al Qaeda, Taliban and affiliates (including ISIL). The formal framework is detailed in UN Security Council resolutions 2160 (Taliban), and 2161 (Al Qaeda and affiliates) and has been reinforced by UNSC Resolution 2178 on foreign terrorist fighters. In adopting these resolutions, the UNSC has recognized IEDs as a major threat and a "proxy" weapon: these resolutions have also mandated the Monitoring Team to assess IED threats posed by terrorist groups and identify the illicit supply chain and target the facilitators; lastly, they have included IEDs and related components in two main sanctions (Arms embargoes and assets freeze)

In addition, after UNMAS assisted the UN Department for Safety and Security (DSS) in adding a section on IEDs to the UN Security Management System Security Policy Manual, it was tasked to devise C-IED guidelines applicable to both civilians and uniformed UN personnel. Using a coordination platform similar to the Inter Agency Coordinating Group for Mine Action (IACG-MA) it chairs, UNMAS initiated a productive and consensual reflection opened to UN partners with direct relevant experience and mandated responsibilities, such as the DSS, Department for Political Affairs (DPA), the Department for Field Support (DFS), together with, within DPKO, the

Office of Military Affairs (OMA), the Division for Policy, Evaluation and Training (DPET) and the Police Division.

The elaboration of these guidelines, currently being transmitted to the “principals’ level” took also into account the perspective of the humanitarian community that UNMAS also serves.

In support of these guidelines, UNMAS was entrusted with the elaboration of a Lexicon aimed at developing a common solid knowledge base. Examples of IED mitigation Working Group structures and stakeholders, as well as “mitigation enablers” are also being annexed to the Guidelines, drawing from “lessons identified” in existing peace operations.

It is noteworthy that these Guidelines also respond to some of the recommendations made by the Secretary General’s Expert Panel on Technology and Information in UN Peacekeeping (December 2014) to enhance peacekeepers’ mobility, mitigate risk and increase awareness of the IED threat amongst UN personnel, which UNMAS together with OMA have been asked to address.

The Panel, amongst other things, identified the need for missions operating in such environments to be provided with necessary capabilities and training to protect themselves and deliver their mandates. The elaboration of a “best practices and lessons identified strategy”, the development of new technologies and training tools, has also been assigned to UNMAS, which, last year, was awarded the UN SG’s award for its innovative and creative spirit.

Meanwhile, the Office for Military Affairs currently leads the UN work on mission-specific matters such as Capabilities and IED survivability, which UNMAS also contributes to.

As awareness and understanding of the problem deepens, within the Organization and amongst its Member States, the UN’s mobilization, is no longer restricted to peace operations or to a reactionary role in capability development.

It is indeed reasonable to assume that our focus will remain on force protection and protection of civilians. With its Member states support, including Troop and Police Contributing Countries and affected countries, both of which pay an increasingly heavy toll in lives lost and devastation, the UN response however is evolving in new directions.

At policy and field level, the UN is organizing itself to integrate in C-IED frameworks, military, police and civil components, including humanitarian, political and public information colleagues.

Whilst the UN civilian and humanitarian communities may still, at times, be reluctant to associate the UN with activities targeting “networks”, their working alongside mission components responsible for UN analysis and information in joint C-IED working groups and

coordination groups, usually co-chaired by UNPOL and UNMAS, make the case that the treatment of IEDs is unlike that of any explosive hazards; the Organization has to consider the dynamic dimension of the threat, including perpetrators and also its root causes, if it wants to continue to serve affected communities and countries.

#### Way forward

Member States' support to the UN reflection and is of critical importance. They would help define the specific areas where the Organization's own intervention adds-value; as well as where the Organization acting in close cooperation together with member states yields greater impact and also clarify areas of C-IED work that sovereign member states will continue to carry out individually. The joint reflection might include discussions on the training needs of peacekeepers.

Our experience in UNMAS leads us to advocate that those Member States which assist Troop and Police Contributing countries with training endeavour to cooperate with the United Nations with a view to aligning bilateral training deliverables with the needs and requirements of the United Nations. This would allow them to meet their strategic partnership objectives whilst also strengthen the UN Troop Contributing Countries (TCCs) and Police ones (PCCs).

This should also be facilitated by UNMAS' undertaking soon to elaborate training benchmarking and International IED related standards, in a way similar to the existing International Mine Action Standards.

In order to move forward efficiently, the UN must agree on its own goals or objectives. Is the UN vision of a world free of explosive hazards realistic in the IED threat context? UNMAS is currently reflecting on the contours of a UN C-IED strategy which would be elaborated in the same inclusive and participatory manner that UNMAS applied to the Mine Action strategy and the Victim Assistance UN Policy in Mine Action.

At this juncture where internal consultations have not yet been formalized, my own view is that the United Nations' end state would be to reduce the threat and impact of IEDs on UN operations and the communities it is mandated to protect. In carrying out collectively a range of activities specific to their respective mandates, relevant UN entities would carry out the "prevent", "protect" and "disrupt the activities of networks" as well as "develop capacities" which would enable the UN to retain its effectiveness.

The strategic objectives of this UN C-IED strategy could mirror those of the UN Mine Action Strategy 2013-2018, in particular those related to the reduction of casualties, transfer of capacities and responsibilities to the host nation, and, mainstreaming of the issue on

international/regional/national “priority agendas”. This approach would benefit from the Organization’s fruitful investment in indicators, benchmarking as well as the UN monitoring and evaluation system.

Based on the documents and tools already being produced by our UN partners, this approach offers the advantage of having been tested, introducing a necessary element of strategic planning and accountability, whilst leaving to UN entities the “space” to comply with their respective specific mandates and requirements.

It is also my firm view that, when this C-IED strategy materializes, the UN will be better placed to articulate its needs and map its requirements, therefore enabling those States in a position to do so to provide the necessary human, financial, tools, and equipment to the Organization and also to affected countries.

As UNMAS faces a significant increase in demands for building national capacities, to provide its field programs and UN partners with data collection, information management and analysis, timely assessments of sensitive situations, technical advice, and other C-IED related assistance including policy related, it has become necessary to strengthen its C-IED HQ 2 persons team with a small number of specialists drawn from member states willing to contribute personnel to be “paired” with rotating UNMAS field experts.

The formalization of the “services” that UNMAS has been rendering for a few years will, de facto, impact positively on the various activities carried out by the UN both at HQ and field level. It will also strengthen UNMAS partnerships with non-UN partner organizations, such as NATO, its Centers of Excellence, the Inter American Defence Board of the OAS, and also the African Union which UNMAS works with closely through a dedicated staff posted in Addis and which we assisted in the elaboration of its “Mine Action and Explosive Remnants of War Strategic Framework 2014-2017”.

### Conclusion

As the UN Secretary General stated on a number of instances during this past year, most notably when he opened the 2015 International Mine Awareness Week, last April, today’s mine action is about “more than mines”. UNMAS serves as a good illustration of the UN capacity to adapt to new threats and fast evolving environments.

The UN offers a diversity of mandates, approaches and skills, which constitute a tremendous wealth of opportunities to counter the IED threat in close partnership with “expert” countries and affected ones, as well as with partner Organizations.

The collective reflection initiated this week by Australia and Interpol proves to be not only filling a significant gap but also extremely timely; indeed, the “world” is getting ready to gather at the UN Headquarters later this month to consider matters of utmost importance, including within the framework of the 28 September Summit convened by American President Barack Obama. At last September’s Summit on Peacekeeping convened by Vice President Biden, the UN Secretary General had mentioned six “critical necessities standing out” which he called “every nation to consider” supporting. “Better protection against IEDs and improved information and analysis, including expertise on organized crime, as well as strong partnerships with regional arrangements” featured on his list.

We look forward to working together with you and take collective action to restore the global security landscape.

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