



Photo by Specialist Spencer J. Case

Bosnian Troops Assist With UXO Removal in Iraq

By Specialist Spencer J. Case

A decade after civil war left thousands of unexploded bombs scattered throughout their homeland, troops from the newly consolidated army of Bosnia and Herzegovina are helping coalition forces dispose of unexploded ordnance (UXO) in southern Iraq. Just last year, two separate armies functioned in Bosnia and Herzegovina—the Army of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Army of the Republic of Serbia.

Last year also saw the birth of explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) as a career field in the Bosnian army after the troops completed training with contractors. Despite the fact that they are relative newcomers in the world of EOD experts, U.S. military leaders have been impressed by the Bosnians. They are safe, productive, and professional in the way they perform their mission.

In Iraq, the mission of the Bosnian unit is to supplement civilian contractors in identifying, removing, and safely detonating UXO in an area where a weapons stockpile was hastily destroyed by exploding it. The initial explosion destroyed most of the weapons; however, it flung miscellaneous bits—called *kick-outs*—over a 13-square-kilometer area. These kick-outs pose a threat to the local population and coalition troops.



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Explosive ordnance detonation specialists with the army forces of Bosnia and Herzegovina uncover an artillery round during their munitions sweep.

As citizens of a war-torn country, the Bosnian troops have seen—firsthand—the devastation wrought by UXO. This gruesome knowledge makes their mission intensely personal. Several Bosnian children have lost their lives or their limbs because they were playing with items such as the scattered kick-outs. Every mine and UXO removed and destroyed is potentially a life or a limb saved.

In March, the Bosnian EOD unit dismounted from their vehicles to form a semicircle around the deputy commander of the mission. They listened attentively as he gave a briefing, running through a list of security and safety procedures in their native language. When the briefing was over, the troops formed a line that resembled a standard police call for trash, scouring the ground for anything resembling a bomb. Some of the shells were obvious, while with others, only the tip of a cone or a bent fin protruded from the soil to warn the Bosnians to step carefully.

The fact that the explosives had been exposed to the elements for so long also made the Bosnians' job more hazardous. The molecular structure of the explosives could have changed over time, with the exposure to sunlight, moisture, and other conditions. As that process occurs, the

explosives can become more stable or unstable than they were originally.

As the Bosnians comb the desert, U.S. Soldiers stand lookout to prevent children and sheep-herding Bedouins from entering areas that have not been cleared. This scene shows the tremendous progress of the Bosnians in the last few years and gives hope to Iraq following the same path to a unified and independent country.

Once a sector was cleared, the UXO was transported by the Bosnians to a blasting area nestled between two dirt hills and placed on the ground beside a crater. The detonations are spectacular, creating mushroom clouds that resemble atomic explosions. The smell of burning phosphorous is a pungent, biting scent that becomes pleasant over time with the realization that there will be—at least from those explosives—no loss of life or limb.



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