



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Media Note

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Bouquet of Flowers Leads to Largest Cache of Abandoned Munitions in Afghanistan

The safety and security of the Afghan people received a major boost this month when the largest cache of abandoned munitions ever found in Afghanistan was secured by NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), thanks to a contractor engaged by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs.

Eighty tons of TNT, over 15,000 anti-personnel and anti-vehicle landmines, detonators, and other hazardous explosives, stored in five old bunkers near Sheberghan (see photos at www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/pix/b/63425.htm) in Jowzjan Province, are now under ISAF control due to the persistence of a UXB International contractor employed by DynCorp International, which is working for the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement to support Afghan explosive ordnance disposal teams.

The bunkers had been suspected of containing explosives that might be unstable and vulnerable to pilferage by criminals and terrorists. A United Nations Development Program (UNDP) official tipped the Department's contractor to this possibility. The contractor subsequently met with the Governor of Jowzjan Province, presented him with flowers, and discussed the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement's efforts to safeguard abandoned or otherwise ill-secured arms and munitions. The Governor then permitted the contractor to enter the bunker complex where everyone's fears were confirmed. The UNDP will arrange for the DynCorp/UXB team to destroy some of the landmines as part of Afghanistan's celebration of "International Day for Mine Awareness and Mine Action" on April 4. The rest of the munitions will be appropriately disposed of later.

The United States has helped to clear landmines and unexploded ordnance in Afghanistan since 1988. Since 1993 alone, when the inter-agency U.S. Humanitarian Mine Action Program was established, the United States has invested over \$152 million to help Afghanistan develop a national humanitarian demining capacity for which it is now renowned, teach mine risk education, provide assistance to survivors of landmine and unexploded ordnance accidents, and secure and destroy excess and abandoned arms and munitions that infest the country.

The Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement currently provides humanitarian mine action, or small arms/light weapons abatement assistance, or both to 28 countries, including Afghanistan. To learn more visit www.state.gov/t/pm/wra. To learn about the full range of United States assistance to Afghanistan, visit www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af.

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