

Chris Clark MBE MC

SafeLane Global Limited Chief Operating Officer

A former senior staff member of United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) with twelve years of operational management of United Nations Mine Action programmes preceded by 17 years distinguished service in the British Army; awarded the **Military Cross (MC)** for conspicuous bravery under fire and also appointed **Member of the Order of British Empire (MBE)**. Received personal letters from the UN Secretary General and two Under Secretary General's praising outstanding efforts and achievements especially "leadership, professionalism and integrity". Has been twice awarded a **UN Commendation for Efficiency** and in 2008 was awarded the prestigious and internationally acclaimed **Nanson Refugee Award** for leadership in South Lebanon during and immediately after the 2006 war. Former Chairman of the International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) Review Board.

Since 2013 has managed SafeLane international operations and currently responsible for all strategic and complex projects as Chief Operating Officer.

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to talk with you today.

I would first like to acknowledge the contribution to global mine action of all the involved British organizations and practitioners, many assembled here today.

I have been continuously involved in this subject as a civilian for some 26 years (12 years of which was with the United Nations Mine Action Service), and before that I was a soldier for 17 years. I therefore consider myself familiar with many differing facets of UK engagement in global Mine Action.

In July 1991, in this very building, Lord Kennet asked Her Majesty's Government a question relating to the

government intentions and policy for clearance of landmines and Un-Exploded Ordnance, including cluster munitions, in post war Kuwait.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Ministry of Defence, The Earl of Arran, replied:

“It has always been the intention of the Government that the vast majority of the clearance of un-exploded ordnance from Kuwait should be undertaken by private companies rather than the armed forces. This follows the long-standing practice of not taking on work that British Industry is well placed to do”

I stand before you today as a long standing representative of that British Industry and confidently tell you that not only are we still “*well placed to do it*” we are currently “*doing it*” in many conflict and post-conflict areas, sadly, rarely for the British government and British interests.

I recently attended a high level Military/MOD and UK Industry forum where a senior British officer lamented the fact that the British Army does not have the numbers of skilled and experienced explosive ordnance disposal personal available to fulfil the required level of engagement with friendly foreign forces. My response to his concern was that 50% of those EOD specialists that he does not have work for me/SafeLane and the other half work for Steve/TetraTech.

In these times of reduced military capacity vs an increasing need I would argue that specialist UK industry companies, such as SafeLane, may not only play a major role in filling that gap but in doing so significantly enhance UK Government outreach and improve Defense Intelligence knowledge of the ever evolving Tactics, Techniques and Procedures of terrorist groups and un-friendly militaries. This knowledge may also include identification of the component part manufacture and usage of both Improvised Explosive Devices and “home made” conventional landmines and UXO.

UK companies, like SafeLane, routinely have a sustained presence “outside the wire” along with long-term presence in conflict zones. Not so long ago SafeLane was concurrently delivering Counter-IED training to troops on the frontline in Mali, Somalia and Yemen. Consider the combined wealth of knowledge amassed in the field of different terrorist/insurgent weapons, Tactics, Techniques and Procedures.

As we head into an unknown and uncertain year in Ukraine something that will remain both certain and known is the presence of large amounts of landmines and UXO. These will need clearing both from a humanitarian perspective, a reconstruction and agricultural development perspective and also from a military perspective; any British troops deployed will

require the certainty of being able to establish and move safely, sure that the threat from Explosive Ordnance has been removed. UK Industry is well placed to complete this task and thus free regular army soldiers to focus on their key military or peacekeeping duties.

Ukraine is undoubtedly now the largest landmine/UXO contaminated country in the world. Whilst exact numbers are uncertain, the sheer size of the country and the widespread laying of extensive barrier minefields and obstacles by the Russians practically assures this unenviable status. The consistent use of artillery, rockets and improvised weaponry dropped from UAV's also implies a large scale of UXO contamination.

This plethora of largely new technology modern weaponry makes Ukraine a very interesting place for those wishing to improve their foreign weapons intelligence knowledge.

You have representatives of some of the most conflict experienced and technically knowledgeable UK Industry companies in this room, both in operational deployment and in training. Our expertise and global footprint is generally not well understood and therefore rarely engaged in support of British interests.

The shortage of EOD skilled personnel has not disappeared, it has just migrated to the private sector.

They are still skilled and motivated, just under different management.

I therefore conclude, and passionately believe, that the UK EOD Industry is ready, willing and able to play a significant role in strengthening UK EOD support to Ukraine. The art of the possible is only a discussion or two away, so lets have that discussion.

Thank you for your attention.