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ANAMA's Ahmad Manafov

by Dane Sosniecki [CISR] - [view pdf](#)

Ahmad Manafov repeatedly uses the word proud to describe his time with the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA). ANAMA may be a smaller mine action agency compared to others in the field, but in terms of services it provides, it has an international reach. "I love my job," Manafov explains.

Established in 1998, ANAMA has cleared 236 sq km (91.4 sq mi) of land, resulting in the destruction of more than 687,000 landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW). As a result of ANAMA's work, more than 160,000 people displaced by conflict resettled.¹ Manafov serves as ANAMA's planning and journal officer. For the last three years, he has actively participated in the establishment of the agency's new donor-relations efforts, boosted its public image and established budgets for the agency's various mine action programs. "I believe that these are key elements of a successful mine action program," he says.

After spending a year in the armed forces, where he quickly rose through the ranks of the Azerbaijani National Guard to sergeant, Manafov decided to serve his country in a different capacity and turned to mine action.

Manafov had the necessary prerequisites to make the switch from the military to the journal field, receiving his bachelor's degree in finance and credit from Azerbaijan State Economic University. He continues his studies today, attending Nakhchivan State University to pursue a degree in social management and law. "The knowledge I am receiving in university allows me to contribute to [ANAMA's] work," says Manafov.

During spring 2013, he continued to hone his managerial skills—particularly as they pertain to planning, contracting and managing programs—as a participant in the Senior Managers' Course in ERW and Mine Action (SMC) at James Madison University. His supervisor, ANAMA Director Nazim Ismayilov, highly recommended Manafov for the SMC, noting that he has proven to be an "exceptional forward-thinker, reliable and dedicated person."

Building National Mine Action Capacity

According to the United Nations journal Programme (UNDP), ANAMA grew from a fledgling institution to one capable of independently operating mine clearance, mine-risk education (MRE) and survivor assistance programs.¹ Manafov agrees with the assessment and says that ANAMA has "aimed to build sustainable national capacity during the first five years. Nowadays that allows ANAMA to offer its capabilities and knowledge to other mine-affected countries."

A conflict with Armenia over the southwestern Azerbaijani region Nagorno-Karabakh created landmine and unexploded ordnance (UXO) contamination and resulted in one million internally displaced persons (IDP). Although a ceasefire ended the six-year war with Armenia in 1994, Armenian military forces continue to occupy approximately 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory and armed clashes along the ceasefire line still occur.^{2,3} After the ceasefire was brokered,



Photo courtesy of CISR.

evidence of an enormous landmine threat was discovered in the surrounding lands, and a presidential decree in 1998 formed the civilian-led ANAMA to conduct humanitarian demining.⁴ The government of Azerbaijan and UNDP established a joint partnership shortly thereafter to provide the necessary mine action training. By 2004, ANAMA had weaned itself from UNDP assistance and began primarily operating on the expertise of its own staff.

Releasing cleared land at a rate of 30 sq km (11.6 sq mi) per year, ANAMA hopes to make Azerbaijan mine-free in the next few years. However, this estimate does not include the occupied Nagorno-Karabakh territory, which is considered to be heavily mined and is controlled by Armenia. Estimates to demine this territory suggest clearance may take another 40 years.⁴ The U.S. Government is the largest international donor to Azerbaijan's conventional weapons destruction (CWD) programs having invested more than \$22 million since 1993 aimed at mine and UXO clearance and humanitarian demining

teams, including mine detection dogs teams.⁵

ANAMA's growing capacity allows for alternative forms of mine clearance, thereby expediting the process. Mine detection dogs (MDD) complement the traditional demining techniques, and Manafov speaks highly of Azerbaijan's MDDs, stating that "ANAMA started developing a local capacity of MDDs to support mine clearance operations in Azerbaijan." ANAMA has two dogs in active use, Aron and Abrek, born and trained in Goygol International Mine Action Resource and Training Center, and an additional 24 puppies in training.⁶ Azerbaijan also uses mine clearance machines, such as the Bozena-4, Bozena-5, and MV-4 medium flail, as well as visual observation in a combined approach to clear mines and other UXO from confirmed hazardous areas.^{1,7}

One of Manafov's favorite projects was the 2011 joint ANAMA/NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NSPA) Partnership for Peace (PfP) Trust Fund Project, "Clearance of Unexploded Ordnance in Saloglu."⁸ After successfully clearing more than 600,000 items of UXO that were scattered throughout 568 ha (2.2 sq mi) of land around the northeastern village of Saloglu, ANAMA, with the support of NATO, built a new sports stadium for the village children using the resources gained from selling the nonferrous metal parts of UXO gathered from the Saloglu operations site.⁹ "The kids played soccer in the new stadium against the deminers," says Manafov.

ANAMA's Work Abroad

Manafov says that ANAMA's chief focus is establishing safe, mine-free living conditions for the local population and achieving ANAMA's primary mission: "Azerbaijan free of mines and UXO." He stresses ANAMA's successes abroad and notes the agency's various training projects, clearance and quality-assurance operations in Turkey and Georgia, as well as its MRE work in Afghanistan.

Manafov mentions that in accordance with the request received from the government of Turkey, ANAMA's Training, Survey and Quality Assurance (TSQA) Division conducted several trainings (Basic Humanitarian Demining Training Course, Level-2; Explosive Ordnance Disposal Course) for Turkish personnel to enable their future involvement in humanitarian mine action activities in Turkey.¹⁰

In 2011, ANAMA signed a contract with Nokta, a Turkish company, on provision of mechanical demining support as well as external quality control services for mine clearance operations along the Turkish-Syrian border crossing point. ANAMA's BOZENA-4 mini flail mechanical demining machine and 10 ANAMA personnel were deployed to the Carchemish area of Gaziantep in Turkey. As a result of these clearance operations, the team cleared 160,000 sq m (39.5 ac), removing and destroying 72 anti-tank and anti-personnel mines.¹⁰

In accordance with the agreement between ANAMA and Sidar Global Advisors, ANAMA started UXO clearance operations on the former military landfill in Diyarbakir province, Turkey, in May 2012. Operations were continued until 30 August 2012. During this period 1,101,492 sq m (272.2 ac) of land was cleared, and 16,912 items of UXO were

destroyed.¹⁰

During 2012, ANAMA also conducted UXO clearance operations in Karapinar settlement of Konya, Turkey, at a military shooting range. During operations 72,000 sq m (17.8 ac) of land was cleared and 407 items of UXO were found and destroyed.¹⁰

Besides the above-mentioned projects, ANAMA is currently involved in final discussions with the Turkish Ministry of National Defence for the clearance of mines along the borders between Turkey and Syria.

Additionally, Manafov talks in detail about ANAMA's work in Afghanistan. In 2008, ANAMA initiated its mine action assistance program to support the Department for Mine Clearance (DMC) of the Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA). Following a needs assessment visit in 2008, ANAMA held a three-week training for DMC staff in Azerbaijan in 2009. During 2009–2010, ANAMA conducted a five-month course for 11 Afghan personnel, followed by a one-month practical demining session in Afghanistan supervised by two ANAMA specialists.

In 2010, ANAMA and the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD) conducted a mine action evaluation training workshop for 10 Afghan personnel. Together with DMC, ANAMA launched an MRE project in 2010 to raise awareness of schoolchildren living in areas contaminated by mines and ERW in Afghanistan. ANAMA's MRE textbooks for pupils and manuals for teachers were adapted to the Afghanistan context and translated into the Dari language through the Afghan Ministry of Education in coordination with DMC and Mine Action Coordination Center of Afghanistan (MACCA). ANAMA's experts provided MRE manuals and training methodologies to 800 teachers from the Kabul and Parwan provinces.


As of April 2013, the Azerbaijan government financially contributed AZN 236,263 (US\$300,202) to the ANAMA mine action program for Afghanistan.¹¹ This figure includes the publication and shipping of 24,000 textbooks and 1,500 teacher manuals to Afghanistan.

ANAMA will continue nonmilitary support to Afghanistan until 2015. This support will include continuing the MRE program, developing a mine victim assistance database, creating an information database, delivering UXO and improvised explosive devices train-the-trainer programs, and providing external quality assurance and certification of cleared areas training as well as supplying equipment.¹²

ANAMA also recently trained the Georgian National Army's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company and signed memoranda of cooperation and agreements with its counterparts in Slovenia and Croatia.^{9,13}

The Future of Mine Action in Azerbaijan

ANAMA continues to grow by establishing relationships with its foreign neighbors and by decreasing its dependence on foreign investment. "In the beginning, donations to ANAMA were mostly from outside Azerbaijan. Now 90 percent of funding comes from the government and 10 percent from international supporters," says Manafov.

Manafov says he hopes that the SMC "experience I gained during the course will allow me to improve my analytical and planning skills. The knowledge that I received will enhance the efficiency of my job." Manafov plans to continue working with ANAMA for the foreseeable future and looks forward to the day when "IDPs will be able to come back and work on their fields without fear." 

Dane Sosniecki, an editorial assistant at the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery (CISR), interviewed Ahmad Manafov when he attended the 2013 Senior Managers' Course on ERW and Mine Action (SMC) at James Madison University. CISR annually organizes the SMC, which is funded by the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (PM/WRA).

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