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Building Capacity to Clear ERW in Georgia

From October 2010 to September 2012, NATO's Georgia Explosive Remnants of War and Medical Rehabilitation Partnership for Peace project provided extensive explosive ordnance disposal training to the Georgian Military Engineering Brigade and supplied needed medical rehabilitation equipment to Gori Military Hospital.

by Gvantsa Kvinikadze [NATO Support Agency]



Georgian soldier during demining training.
All photos courtesy of the author.

On 28 September 2012 the Military Engineering Brigade of the Georgian Armed Forces hosted a ceremony for soldiers from the Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company. The ceremony commemorated their successful completion of an extensive training program provided by NATO's Georgia Explosive Remnants of War and Medical Rehabilitation Partnership for Peace project (2010–2012).

The NATO PfP project grew out of an appeal by Georgia to NATO requesting assistance with clearing ERW, much of which was created during the war

between Georgian and Russian forces in 2008. Georgia also faces the problem of Soviet-era legacy minefields. Therefore, forming a national capability for coping with these challenges in accordance with International Mine Action Standards seemed necessary. NATO Support Agency (NSPA) designed the project to strengthen the Georgian Army's Explosive Ordnance Disposal Company.

The project consisted of two major elements: ERW clearance support and medical rehabilitation. The Czech Republic, Estonia and Lithuania (as

lead nations) largely sponsored, both politically and financially, the NATO project. Fourteen other NATO members and partners—Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Denmark, Israel, Japan, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom and the United States—made financial contributions to the project's EU€1,540,000 (US\$2.1M as of 25 January 2013) budget. NSPA (previously NATO Maintenance Supply Agency), which served as the executing agent during the 2003–2006 and 2008–2012 PfP Trust Fund projects to demilitarize outdated missiles, implemented this project.¹

In its earliest stages, NSPA tailored the project to fit Georgia's specific needs. According to David Towndrow, NSPA's project manager, the project aimed to "provide Georgia with a military capability to clear legacy minefields and free land contaminated by hazardous ammunition left over from previous conflicts, thus contributing to [the] creation of [a] safer environment and more economic opportunities for the local population.

"This goal," he adds, "would be achieved by providing specialist equipment and training based on international standards to the EOD Company of the Military Engineering Brigade."



Soldiers from the EOD Company prepare for a blast during training.

ANAMA

Following a competitive, international bid in February 2011, the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action was selected to provide the training package. In recent years, ANAMA gained clearance and training experience in Azerbaijan and in other countries. In addition, ANAMA established a comprehensive training center in Goygol, northwest Azerbaijan.

In July 2011 ANAMA completed a NATO PFP project to clear more than 600,000 unexploded ordnance items that were scattered throughout 568 ha (2.2 sq mi) of land in Saloglu, a village in Azerbaijan's Northeast region. These scattered items of UXO were the result of an explosion at the main Russian military ammunition depot in the early 1990s. Its experience clearing Soviet/Russian-manufactured UXO from Saloglu was one of the reasons why ANAMA was chosen to train Georgian EOD troops to identify specific UXO types encountered in Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Elnur Gasimov, head of ANAMA's Training, Survey and Quality Assurance Division, says, "ANAMA has 13 years' ex-

perience in humanitarian demining operations, and we have worked with the militaries of different countries, including Azerbaijan, Turkey and Syria on different types of projects. The Georgia project, which envisages providing basic as well as specialist courses and practical training, is quite complex. We believe that after this intensive training the EOD Company will be fully prepared to take the responsibility for coping with existing ERW threats and greatly benefit Georgia."

EOD Training

Training began at the end of March 2011. All 66 members of the EOD Company completed a month-long training course that covered basic demining, EOD and battle area clearance at ANAMA's regional training center in Goygol, Azerbaijan. Following the theoretical components of the courses, students practiced hands-on clearance using inactive mines and completed EOD/BAC tasks using live munitions on a military artillery range in Saloglu. The training in Azerbaijan ended with a Technical Survey course geared toward training 15 military engineers, who were selected based



The EOD Company works with metal detectors during training.

on their performance during the basic courses as well as their future functions within the EOD Company. Courses for instruction methods, site supervision, information management and quality assurance/quality control, which did not need specialist facilities or designated training areas, were held at the soldiers' barracks in Georgia.

In order to confirm the capability of the EOD Company as an established yet independent organization, five months of mentoring in Georgia followed the comprehensive series of courses, from April to September. In this stage, ANAMA instructors provided supervision and mentorship to the EOD Company as it conducted live clearance operations at two sites designated by the Georgian Ministry of Defense. To provide the opportunity to practice different humanitarian demining skills, one site was classified as a minefield and the other as a battle area.

Acting commander of the EOD Company, Senior Lt. Mikheil Katsiashvili thinks that the mentoring phase provided an opportunity for the Company to consolidate the learned skills obtained during the training courses. Katsiashvili remarks, "I believe that the new skills provided by the NATO project will successfully build on our own extensive experi-

ence in EOD. We are looking forward to the time when we start planning and implementing the operations independently according to the humanitarian standards and contributing to the safety of our population in this way, too."

NSPA procured the basic and specialist equipment, worth EU€460,000 (US\$619,574 as of 25 January 2013), that was provided to the EOD Company before the start of the mentoring phase. The list of equipment was developed in consultation with the Georgian MoD and ANAMA. It consisted of items necessary for conducting demining and EOD/BAC operations. These items included different types of personal protective equipment, mine detectors and deminer tool kits. In September 2012, under Phase II of the project, the EOD Company received three minibuses and three all-terrain, pickup vehicles, which will significantly improve its operational capabilities.

Medical Rehabilitation

Gori Military Hospital was the sole beneficiary of the project's medical-rehabilitation element. Thanks to the generous contribution of the Czech Republic, the project's largest sponsor, Gori Military Hospital received medical equipment




Vice Prime Minister of Georgia and State Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Giorgi Baramidze (Ret), H.E. Ambassador of the Czech Republic in Georgia Ivan Jestřáb, and the Gori Military Hospital staff tour the physiotherapy department to see the new equipment.

worth EU€80,000 (US\$107,752 as of 25 January 2013). This element of the plan was aimed at enhancing the capabilities of the hospital's physiotherapy department, which treats wounded military personnel and civilians. NSPA, which closely cooperated with the Czech Republic, Georgian MoD and the hospital's physiotherapy department, created the equipment list.

Nino Kervalishvili, head of the physiotherapy department at the Gori Military Hospital, appreciates the donation. She comments: "We were providing the medical-rehabilitation treatment with existing minimal technical capabilities in [the] physiotherapy department. With the installation of the new, advanced equipment purchased under the NSPA project, we now provide [a] wide range of services, like movement therapy, medical massage, hydrotherapy, etc., to the patients with various types of injuries or traumas." A closing ceremony for the medical-rehabilitation element of the project was held in June 2012.

Success Impacts Future

Irakli Kochashvili, deputy head of the Euro-Atlantic Integration Department at the Georgian MoD notes the project's achievements: "The project is significantly different in its content from the previous two projects as it is mainly focused on capability development of the Georgian Armed Forces ... GAF has obtained a unit that is capable to conduct humanitarian demining fully compliant with IMAS for the sake of very humanitarian purposes—safety and security of people."

As the ERW Clearance Support and Medical Rehabilitation project concludes, NATO and Georgia remain interested in continuing their cooperation. Thus, hopes are high that a new PfP Trust Fund project will soon follow. 

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1. "Deepening Relations with Georgia." *NATO OTN: Background*. <http://tinyurl.com/cjl3624>. Accessed 18 December 2012.